Student Interviews Fifty Years Later: 2017
An Oral History

with

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Carl Eadler
Tommy Herz
Khalen Hudson
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Rosa Melero
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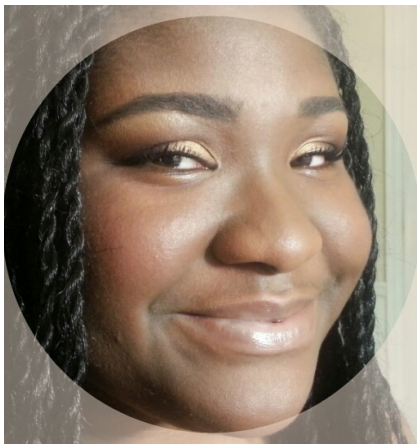

Interviewed by Cameron Vanderscoff
Edited by Irene Reti and Cameron Vanderscoff

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Santa Cruz

University of California, Santa Cruz

University Library

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Interview History

This is a book born from listening to students. The Regional History Project at UC Santa Cruz has rich collections of interviews with generations of narrators, ranging across the administration, faculty, and staff. In the early years of the campus, founding director Elizabeth Spedding Calciano conducted two rounds of interviews focused on the student experience at what was then the newest campus of the University of California.[1] Those interviews, conducted in 1967 and 1969 as the campus was still adding a new college every year, give a window into the original UCSC experiment, and into a time of sociocultural transformation as students responded to the Vietnam War and other social justice issues of the time. While the Project's archive includes various individual interviews with students conducted in the intervening years, in 2016 a decision was made by director Irene Reti to launch a follow-up endeavor focused specifically on the student perspective at UCSC today.

The ensuing project, *Student Interviews: 50 Years Later*, consists of fourteen interviews conducted in April and October 2017 in a conference room at the McHenry Library. In many ways, it was a very different endeavor from the original *Student Interviews*. At the beginning of 1967, there were only two colleges at UCSC; in 2017, there were ten, and the student population had boomed exponentially from less than 1,000 to more than 18,000. UCSC has grown into a major research university, offering more than sixty undergraduate majors and dozens of graduate programs across the divisions. In selecting students, there were new challenges of scale, and the challenge of finding a scope of voices that could speak to meaningfully different and diverse experiences on campus became a project in itself.

However, while many things have changed at UCSC, this was a venture of continuities as well. Like the original *Student Interviews*, we accepted from the beginning that it was neither possible nor desirable to strive for a group that could fully represent the student story at UCSC.

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[1] See https://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/student for a link to the complete text of these volumes, as well as selected audio excerpts.

In addition to that story being far too plural and varied, we know that surprise and singularity are as much an element in oral history work as trends and commonalities. This is a gathering of unique and powerful life histories. That said, we did seek a group that could illustrate distinct points along the range of student experience here. Taking our cue from the '67 and '69 interviews, we contacted the provost of each college for recommendations, compiling a long list that we narrowed down to our final candidates. We also reached out to the directors of the resource centers, EOP, the graduate division, and selected student organizations. As a result, all ten colleges are represented here, as are many resource centers. While the group is mostly undergraduates, we do have graduate students as well. We also made certain that we had majors from all divisions, and strove for an intersectionally diverse and dynamic group, exploring relationships to place and space through the lens of racial and ethnic identity, sexuality, gender, class, and other markers of social difference. For *50 Years Later*, this task was baked into our larger exploration of our narrators' academic and extracurricular work at UCSC, as well as their life histories, inspirations, struggles, and aspirations.

One notable bias of our selection process is that, since we largely relied on faculty and staff recommendations, we tended to locate students that were exceptionally involved in their residential or academic communities, and were therefore especially visible to their recommenders. There are, of course, many other students who choose different spheres of involvement, or who, especially in the context of a growing research university, may simply not find the same recognition. For those who are struck by the thoughtfulness, eloquence, and importance of the stories included in this compendium, it is our hope that this reading can be the beginning of a greater curiosity about and connection with the breadth of the student experience at UCSC. These are voices that need to be heard more widely and more clearly when it comes to the present and future of this campus.

An unexpected parallel between the '67 and '69 student interviews and this new '17 project came through the rise of political awareness, activism, and debate at UCSC in the aftermath of the election of Donald Trump. The Sixties interviews took place in the Johnson and

Nixon presidencies, a time when many students here were asking pointed questions about the priorities of their school, the Vietnam War, the nature of their education, and the future of justice in their society. These themes return in our 2017 interviews, as students share their life journeys of coming to this campus, their work finding a place here—more than one narrator describes our campus as a "PWI [predominantly white institution]"—and their hopes for how their UCSC education can shape their opportunities and outlook going forward. While some of their stories are particular to certain colleges or majors, many shine a light on deeper issues about this campus, including who is welcome here, how students adapt and make their way in their education, and what debates, dialogues, and differences mark the institution today. These are stories of community, stories of creativity, and stories of critique alike.

When these interviews were conducted, I was a relatively recent alum myself (Cowell '11). In many ways, the campus described to me by these narrators was familiar: many of the things I found special, important, and transformative about this space also resonated in their stories. In other ways, however, it was notably different. For instance, I mentioned in multiple interviews that Obama was elected during my undergrad years, whereas Trump was elected in their time here. The political landscape has changed, as has the student response to it, and I came away from these interviews moved by the work that these narrators were doing in their studies and in their communities. For me, this project is dedicated to hearing student voices, centering them, and amplifying them. Taken as a whole, these voices remind me that a university's greatest resource for change is its student body; the group gathered in this collection have, in ways large and small, reimagined and reinvented UCSC's legacies and histories for different issues and different times. These are engaged thinkers about our campus, and their interviews bring with them a renewed conversation about what questions we should all now ask about the institution we have, whether for a few years or many, called home.

In closing, this project is grateful to the many people who have made it possible. First, to the student narrators, who made time out of their class, work, volunteer, and social schedules to participate. They were both reflectively analytical and courageously personal, and I am in debt

to their commitment, curiosity, and conviction in sharing their UCSC story. I also wish to thank Project director Irene Reti for her leadership, mentorship, and care. She has dedicated her time to sourcing narrators, workflow management, and close consultation and collaboration from her own perspective as a UCSC staffer and alum; throughout, she has given life to this project and inspired me in my role as interviewer. As always, thank you to the staff of Special Collections, who point me in the right directions and make me feel at home every time I visit, even though I now live three thousand miles away. Copies of this volume are on deposit in Special Collections and in the circulating stacks at the UCSC Library, as well as on the library's website. The Regional History Project is supported administratively by Teresa Mora, Interim Head of Special Collections and Archives, and University Librarian Elizabeth Cowell.

—*Cameron Vanderscoff, Interviewer*

New York, NY, January 2018

Sareil Brookins

At the time of this interview, Sareil Brookins was a sophomore at Stevenson College, where she lives at the Rosa Parks African American Theme House. She is majoring in psychology and critical race and ethnic studies. She grew up in Sacramento, California, the daughter of a Mexican, Italian, and Native American mother and an African American father. Brookins works for Destination Higher Education, an outreach program which introduces newly admitted students to the Afrikan/Black/Caribbean community and student life on the UC Santa Cruz campus. She's also a residential mentor at the Rosa Parks African American Theme House and a retention outreach officer for Black Students United.

Vanderscoff: So today is Monday, April 10, 2017, and this is Cameron Vanderscoff here for the Student Interviews Oral History project. So just for the record, I'm wondering if we could start off with you introducing yourself, who you are, in whatever words you choose.

Brookins: Okay. Including my name?

Vanderscoff: Please.

Early Background

Brookins: So my government name is Sareil Brookins, but I go by Reil, whichever people can pronounce. All my life, people have acted like Sareil is really hard to pronounce, so I just say Reil now, since I got to college, at least. I'm from Sacramento, California, the capital that

nobody knows about. Extremely diverse, and it's huge compared to Santa Cruz. I grew up in a specific part of Sacramento that's older. The minority is probably white folks. Not that I didn't see white folks, because you cross the overpass and it's like white city. So, I was pretty well-versed in diversity and handling certain people and whatnot. All my life I went to very diverse high schools and elementary schools and went to daycare, all that. I have siblings. My mother is Mexican, Italian, and Native American. My dad is African American, or African, as he says.

I'm a psych and CRES [Critical Race and Ethnic Studies] major, emphasis in African diaspora and revolution.

Vanderscoff: That's great. That's a great place to start. So, we're going to talk about all of those different threads of your life and your identity, and then how they manifest in terms of the work you do here at UCSC. But just to start, I'm wondering if you could connect some of them to your early education and then to the process of going to college.

Brookins: My identities?

Vanderscoff: Yeah, I'm curious if you could walk through some of your early educational background, because we're going to talk about a lot of these themes as they intersect with your educational experience here. So, if you could give us a little bit of background in that and then building into how you decided A, to go to school and B, this school.

Brookins: All right. So, I live in an area [of Sacramento] that's not at all poor. I'm in between the hood and semi-hood, and then there's my neighborhood. So, it was usually black and brown students for the most part, usually Latinx and black students in my elementary school. I'm not sure if this is relevant, but it was thrown in my face that I was one, not black enough and two, black. So, I started noticing certain things. Students would, from kindergarten and up, they'd ask, "Who's that lady picking you up? Is that your nanny? Is that your grandma?

Who is this white-looking woman?" So, I'd have to keep explaining to people, "That's my mom."

A lot of times when my dad would pick me up, it's like, "Oh, yeah, you're black. That's your dad," because my skin totally is darker. So, when comparing myself to them, I always had this struggle of, so do I call myself black? Do I call myself Mexican? I didn't know about Afro Latinx because I didn't know Latinx back then. So, a lot of my elementary school life was dealing with black students thinking I'm not black enough. And then I tried hanging out with the Mexican students that went to the school, and it was like, well, you're not as fluent in Spanish as you need to be. So even up to middle school I was kind of just trying to figure myself out racially.

But I did find my love for athletics. I was really good in track and field. I was really good in volleyball. I tried softball. I did gymnastics for six years. Then when I got to high school, my sports got cut. Well, my freshman year I did sports and stuff, specifically volleyball and track. At one point, I was doing them at the same time, so it was like 24 hours of just sports and I was in great fit.

And then they got cut, and that's when I found my love for community service, going out into the community and dedicating my time to everybody else except myself. So, my original resume has stuff from middle school all the way up to now; some of it includes my senior project that was specifically for my younger sister. She went to the elementary school that I went to. And so even then I would notice the differences of when students would notice the race, when they noticed how they were treated, when they noticed why they were being made fun of. So that was interesting, and that made me really get more into psychology. But I didn't know about CRES until I got here. So, I was really thinking about how crucial it is how students grow up in elementary school, and how that can affect their basically adulthood life and decisions and whatnot.

I also volunteered in the animal shelters. I volunteered at my middle school for the sports events and stuff. I was always constantly going back to my elementary school, or middle school, or math tutor for the middle school or the high school, or tutoring students that were my grade. I did yearbook. It was just all over the place. I felt the need to be really involved, because if I couldn't do sports, I was like, I need to do something. So, other than being that A-plus student who was almost the valedictorian, I was dedicating most of my time to community service.

And once it came to sophomore year, my mom started taking me on college road trips, essentially in California, in NorCal and SoCal. And then junior year we took the SATs and stuff. I can't really say it was drilled in my head like, "You're going to school." It was just, "You're first generation. If you do go, nobody else in the family has gone on both sides." And I felt like I was putting in so much work, I needed to offer it somewhere. So, I was highly encouraged to go to college. But they were always like, "If you don't want to go to college, just make sure you're working. Then maybe think about a JC or something." They just don't want me to sit around—and I don't want to sit around.

Coming to UC Santa Cruz

So, senior year came, and then I applied to a ton of schools. UC Santa Cruz, I really just was like oh, this place looks cool. I went here for my senior ditch day and I was like, what a pretty city!

Vanderscoff: This is where you went for your senior ditch day? (laughs)

Brookins: Yeah. It was like four of us and we all came here. And I was like, wow, this place is nice. So, I got in, and then I also got in San Diego State, San Jose State and other ones, other UCs. And I do regret not applying to UCLA and UC Berkeley or Stanford, because, I don't know, I just didn't have the confidence in myself and I was worried because I wasn't

valedictorian. So, I assumed I wouldn't get in. However, come to find out I totally could have got in. But the past is the past—I will leave that alone.

So, I got into UC Santa Cruz and San Diego State. And both of these had retention programs for black students. At San Diego State, it was called Harambee Weekend, and it's maybe eighty black students who come. It was so much fun. My mom drove me all the way down there. It was only two days, so one night, and it was really fun. And I was like, you know what? I'm going to go to San Diego State; it's popping, it's so much fun, wow.

Destination Higher Education

But then UC Santa Cruz was like, hey, come to DHE, which is Destination Higher Education, part of SIO weekend. SIO is Student-Initiated Outreach, where students like myself now outreach to prospective students who got in, who identify as ABC [Afrikan Black Coalition]. Or they have one called ASF, which is for Asian American students, and then one for Latinx students. So, I was called in for DHE and even that was a thing—I was worried that I wouldn't be called in for anything because I marked black *and* Mexican. So, I was just like, well, maybe I won't get in. But I was set on San Diego State. I told my mom and she was like well, okay.

So, then I came here for DHE and it blew my mind. It completely, I guess you'd say, woke me up. Because I was, I know you hear the term like "woke" or "she's so woke," or really conscious. I totally, that was one of the turning points of my life in terms of like okay, okay, I'm black—I realize that. It tends to be usually when I'm asked what I am, they're like, "Oh, are you black and something else?" Black and this, black and that. So regardless of what I thought I was, I was like okay, I'm going to identify as black usually, always. And my dad, when he noticed that I started becoming more woke, he started teaching me things before I came to school. So that just added on to my confidence *in* being able to identify as black. But also, I always recognize and tell people I'm also Mexican. But I guess—my mom hasn't really taken the time to talk to me really about that history. Spanish was my first language, but then I

switched to English because I had a different daycare lady. So that's why I can still speak Spanish when I have to—only when I have to.

I was really happy about UC Santa Cruz. So, I started freaking out because I was like, I don't know where I want to go. And UC Santa Cruz, the difference was like they highlighted that yeah, we have fun times, but we also are super about our education and black people. It was closer to home, and I made a lot of cool friends who I wanted to be roommates with. I made real genuine connections, like more than ten people I still keep in contact with, whether or not they came to UC Santa Cruz. At San Diego State, it's like two, and they were really about the party life. I had to come here to realize, yeah, that's not for me. So that's how I ended up here.

Vanderscoff: That's great. So, if you could reflect a little further, what was it that was happening here in this program that set it so clearly apart, in terms for you being a political awakening, or an experience of getting woke?

Brookins: Good question. So, it's funny you ask. This week is DHE and I'm volunteering as a bus chaperone and overnight chaperone, which I did last year as well. Anyways, so what they have are workshops; they have resource fairs; they have mixers. You get to mix in with the other students of color. When I went, particularly what changed my whole mindset was they had this group come in—I cannot remember their names, I have their card somewhere—they came in and pretty much simulated what it would have been like to have been African. Like we were blindfolded, basically, and went into a room holding each other's shoulders. All you had were your ears and your nose to smell things, and they basically made a simulation of what it would have been like to be African, to have been stripped away from everybody. And it was scary because it was pitch black, and they had music. They had very vivid descriptions of what you were doing at that moment. There were people crying, in tears because they were like, I've never been forced to be in that situation. So, when that happened, I had this

realization that I needed to really look into who I am, and pay my respects to the folks that sacrificed themselves, or were forced to, for people like myself and other students.

So, there was that. And the genuine connections, the amount of knowledge that the students were willing to give me—any questions I had, I had answered. I felt like compared to when I went to San Diego State, there was one center where they said, "Yeah, you all can go here for questions." But here, there was the African American Resource and Cultural Center; there's the ATAT, the African American Theater Arts Troupe; there's BSU, Black Students United; BMA, Black Man Alliance; ABS, African Black Student Alliance; there's NSBE for black engineers; there's ASU for African Student Union; there's EOP for low-income, first-generation students; there's the DRC [Disability Resource Center]. There were all these places where I felt more supported. And they told us about protests that they had, actions that they had. And I was just like, is this college? Is this what college is about? I was really excited and couldn't wait 'til I'd come here.

And then that next year, I volunteered as the bus chaperone, which was just so surreal, no pun intended (laughs) to me, because I was like, "I was just here, I was just in your place." And then I did overnight chaperones, and it was just amazing.

When I got here, I was put in the AMP program, which is African American Mentorship Program, where I had a third-year and I was a first-year. And she was a psych major as well, and so it was just like I never really felt alone. I had a lot of friends to go to.

First Impressions of UC Santa Cruz

And a big, big part of why I came here was because we got a tour of R.PAATH, which is the Rosa Parks African American Theme House in Stevenson, the most white college. And I was like wow, they really need us here. And the RAs [residential assistants] were two people I connected with over that program, and they're like, "Yeah, you should come here, it's going to

be great." And it was just nice to walk into a place and see people who look like you the majority of the time. It was like 80 percent when I came here. When I ended up coming here that first year, it was like 80 percent black students.

Vanderscoff: Stevenson is your college, so tell me about how that happened then—if you could, reflect on that impression you had, that feeling you had about this place and what it would do for you. And then if you could take me to your first impressions of coming here, how you wound up at Stevenson and what those impressions were of what the reality of this place was.

Brookins: Okay. I probably should have mentioned that earlier, but the first time I set foot here I was like, where are the black people? Because there was us, and that was it. I honestly cannot remember if I saw anybody else outside of the program other than the mentors and the RAs that I had, so that I definitely noticed this is a PWI. At the time, I didn't know what PWI was. They're like, "Yeah, PWI." I was like, "What is that?" They told me "predominantly white institution." I was like "Yeah, that's definitely what this is." So, coming from Sacramento, that was something that really had me on the line: do I want to go here? Do I not want to go here?

So, my first impression was definitely like, I'm not going to see a lot of me here. But that gave me all the more reason to come here and try to make some change and live in R.PAATH. There was folks wearing their bonnets, do-rags and stuff, and there was no questioning, there was no like, "What's that on your head? Why are you doing that to your hair?" and stuff like that. So, when I went to R.PAATH, I realized it would be the place I want to live, because the students that I met on DHE, we requested each other in a room and we got each other. They were a huge reason why I survived.

My first year was very tragic. There were some family deaths and stuff my first quarter, during finals week. It was weird because this other summer program I went on after DHE called JUSTICE—I cannot remember what it stands for—but that program, they pull students from

each Student-Initiated Outreach weekend who go to the school for ten days. And it's all free. You get homework and you're prepared. And there was a speaker who came and said, "Be ready. What if Gramps dies during finals week?" And I was like oh, that's not going to happen. Not that my grandpa died, but it was a close cousin of mine. And honestly, had I not lived in R.PAATH, I probably would have lost—can I curse?

Vanderscoff: Yeah.

Brookins: Probably would have lost my shit totally.

Vanderscoff: Right.

Brookins: Because it was just nice having that support system. The roommates that I had, the RAs that I had, I was really close to. And it just hit me really hard. And then there were people who referred me to CAPS [Counseling and Psychological Services], and there was a black counselor and just on and on, and that's where I met my now-supervisor from the AARC Center, the African American Resource Center, who also referred me to CAPS and became one of my mentors. So, it was just a constant line of referring and knowing people and getting in contact, and becoming really familiar with the black faculty here. So that happened. I had never really dealt with like death like that, you know, head on. So, I'm really grateful that I was in R.PAATH and had people I didn't have to keep explaining myself to. There would be days I would just not talk, or I would just freeze and then start crying; somebody was there to hold me and calm me down and stuff. And my mom was really supportive, my dad; everybody back home was aware. And it was really, really hard, because I was so used to being home, so not being able to go home that weekend was very sad and unfortunate. But I still had people here who took care of me and kept in contact with my parents when I just wasn't responding or just doing my own thing.

Stevenson College

Vanderscoff: (pauses) So you find this incredible enclave, this community of color within Stevenson, and you talked about some of its value to you. Could you speak a little bit about the wider community at Stevenson? First of all, how you came to be at that college in particular? And then your experience of adjusting to that setting, in which you had a really close-knit community, but then there's a larger, there's a larger college at this PWI, right?

Brookins: Right. So, the only reason I'm honestly in Stevenson is because that's where R.PAATH was, is. It's House 7, and being there was great—it was like chocolate city. And then I walk out and I'm like oh, I live in the chocolate chip house in a vanilla shake. That was the best analogy I could come up with, was like we are the one chocolate chip in the vanilla swirl. So that was very easy to recognize.

Being in the dining hall, there would be times you knew where the black people were, because they were sitting together. Or there was only one, and it could just be me sometimes. It was just recognizing that I'm not in Sacramento anymore. There was a lot of times I'd call my dad, "Dad, I cannot do this. Help me." And it was hard because he didn't go to college; my mom didn't go to college. 'So, I had nobody to ask, "Hey, so what should I experience?" So that's when I turned to the older students who came from my city, or closer or similar cities.

Being in core class: that's a big deal. I can't believe I forgot [to talk about] that. I was the only black student in all my core classes. We were taking it two quarters. And the first quarter was extremely difficult. Because one, I was, at the time, one of the only Christian-identifying students. And I don't know if you know about Stevenson core course first quarter, but it's all about, in my opinion, completely anti-religion. It's all about the scholars like Plato and Marxism and the guy who talks about nihilism and nothingness, I can't remember--

Vanderscoff: Nietzsche?

Brookins: Yes. That guy. Oooh, that guy. (laughter) It was all about those folks who talk—I mean, we literally had to read from the Bible, and then the freaking core instructors, and all of them, would be like, "Yeah, this is why that's not real. This is why that's not realistic. This is not true." And students in there felt entitled to be like, "Yeah, I don't understand why people follow religion," and, "That's stupid." So, I was already being pushed to the edge of believing in anything, and then that death happened. And I was like, wow, there's no God. I just completely gave up. I went into a deep sadness, and had I not had the R.PAATH community I probably would have dropped out or something. Because there was a lot of times I was like, "Mom, I need to take a quarter off." She's like, "No, you got this."

So being that black voice was irritating. When they'd talk about—because then it was called out that I was the only student who had identified as a Christian. And so that was hard, because then students would still feel the need to talk, or ask me questions. And I still wasn't even fit in my religion. I just knew that I had identified with one. So that was difficult.

Second quarter saved my butt. I loved it. We started reading Malcom X; we started reading Gloria Anzaldúa; we started reading Martin Luther King—all these writers of color. And I was like wow, so core is cool. And I had the greatest instructor. But I was, again, the only black student. So, my blackness was always questioned and asked about and looked at. And we watched *Selma.* I had seen it like five times. But I was like, "I'm going to watch it with you all again." And, of course, they're asking questions.

I was doing fine in the course until one day, which changed my whole perspective. I came to class like twenty minutes late, had my essay ready. I came in and everybody was in groups. So, I just went to the core instructor. I was like, "My bad, I was busy," whatever. I sat at my table but I was on my phone. And then I overheard a conversation in the front of the room. Loud and clear—just as loud as this, and the room was this quiet. And the keywords I heard, that that's all I needed to hear, was "black students, stupid, ignorant and irrelevant." And I was

like, what? I felt this feeling I had never felt before in life. I felt like I was in that position where a lot of people talk about, "You're going to face this." And I was like, "No way!" So that was essentially that moment.

There were students in the class who were talking about this protest that I had previously participated in fall quarter. This was winter quarter, they were talking about it. So, in fall quarter, we had a protest where it was in solidarity with University of Missouri. I don't know if you heard about it, but there were black students being threatened with death threats and like, "We're going to lynch you," from white students. Like, "Don't come to class—we're going to kill you." And the university did nothing. So, on that specific day, almost all UCs stood in solidarity. It wasn't just our UC. I believe this was kind of near finals week as well.

So that happened, and then winter quarter I'm sitting in class and this student's talking about, "Yeah, whatever the black students were protesting was stupid. They don't even know what they were doing. What happens over there is irrelevant to the black students here. You know, that's just dumb. People are trying to eat at the dining halls," because we had blocked it off. I felt enraged. I think that's the angriest I've ever been. I was so angry, but I was like, I don't want to get up and be that mad black woman or that stereotypical, "Oh, she's going to blow!" or something like that. I sat there and I was like, okay, what are you going to do? This was literally the week before we learned about MLK, which was not a coincidence.

I went to the front of the class. I say, "Hey, I need to go outside." And I had tears coming out of my eyes. And my instructor really, really cared for me; I went to his office hours all the time. He was a close instructor of mine, I'd say, more so a friend. So, I went outside for like ten minutes, and then he came outside and basically asked me what's going on. At first, I was like, "I don't want to talk about it." And then I just burst into angry tears. I was yelling, "I can't believe they would do that," and, "They don't understand. They don't know anything about the situation." So, he basically was like, "Do you want to speak in front of the class right now?"

And I was like, "Absolutely not. I'm going to punch somebody in the face. I'm angry." And he's—I tell him all the time, "You need to realize how big of a role you played that day in my life. Because I was not going to talk." And he was like, "I think you should, because next week we talk about MLK and reading him. So, you could talk about a lot of things, actually. And I'm sorry that I didn't hear that [comment from the student]." And he apologized.

I was like, "Okay. I'll talk." So, I went in there and I just sat down with my back straight and my hands folded. And I was like, "Hello, everyone." I really just laid it down after he gave a small talk on being aware of your surroundings, who you're talking around. Make sure you educate yourself, blah, blah, blah. And one of the students from that group actually raised their hand when he asked, "Are there any questions" And he was like, "Yeah, when do we leave?' So, then I shot my hand up and that's when I pretty much gave my on-the-spot, spontaneous speech. I was just going on about Missouri, why we did it, what it means, why what they said was completely ignorant and messed up. And then I started talking about like my experiences here, like just being in that class by myself, like you all don't know what this is like.

And good came out of it, because some of those students did apologize for not speaking up, or for just sitting there, or basically not stopping what was happening. And then there were students who also were like, "Wow, I'm so sorry. What do you mean, you go through this?" Again, I had to try and validate what I just freaking explained to the entire class. So, I was just like, "I'm only going to tell you this once, and not again." So, some of those students who actually were in that class, I'm really still friends with. That's pretty much the reason why, because I went out and spoke and I shifted the entire class. And ever since then, I've been very verbal in every single class, pretty much. So, Stevenson, I was like wow, there really are those folks here.

Vanderscoff: So for that to happen in a class, you have to kind of carry that torch or bear that load. Then I guess it becomes all the more significant that you can go home to a place where you don't have to name those things all the time.

Brookins: Yeah. [sighs] I was much more—I remember the first time going back to Sacramento was, I don't even know—I came home a lot that first quarter. And the first time I saw a black person, I was extremely friendly, smiling and waving, and just, "Hi, how was your day?" I didn't even know them and they were like, "What the heck is wrong with you? Like chill, I'm just here." And I'm like, "No, you don't understand. Help me." (laughs) I was extremely friendly. And even when I had taken summer classes that following summer, I was like that at Sac City College. And people were looking at me really weird. I was like, "You all need to be grateful that you go here." So that definitely changed my attitude around seeing black people anywhere.

Majoring in Psychology

Vanderscoff: Something I wanted to be sure to talk about is your journey as a psych major. You talked about your experience as a community member at Stevenson and then in the core course there, but if you could connect that to the center of your study here at UCSC?

Brookins: Well, after all my previous experiences, I took Psych 1 winter quarter, because I didn't get in fall quarter. But when I did, I definitely struggled a lot, because my mind really wasn't here at school; it was still on grief and stuff like that. So, it was really hard to focus. But once I did get into like, yeah, I like psychology, I did get really tired of being taught about this experiment by this white man on white babies; this experiment by this white man on monkeys; this white man, this white man, this white man, you know, or this Italian guy. I was so just irritated. Because I was like, there's no way in hell that white people at this moment in time were the only psychologists doing experiments and stuff. The Stanford prison project, I think it was all white men. And I'm like, can we be representative of who's in prison? I just started

analyzing every single thing I learned in pretty much every single class. I had a friend of mine who was in that class with me, who—thank goodness she was—and she would ask a lot of questions like, "So do you know any other studies, other than by these white men?" So that got irritating.

And as I went on in psych, I can say from my opinion, the psych department has some of the most friendly professors—very understanding. I remember when I took Psych 2. [One] night I had this big mental breakdown. I was freaking out, panicking, because I was like oh, death, I hate it, I miss her, my cousin. And so, I went to the professor and I was already crying. I was trying to explain myself and the professor was like, "You just turn it in when you can." I cried even more. I was like, "You're amazing." And these are white professors. And I'm always told, "Be careful, white professors don't give a fuck." And I was just like, "Are you sure?" So that happened. I did really good in that class. I tended to go to office hours all the time.

We do offer an African American psych class, but it's only in the summer. But I will be taking it this summer, because I hear that that changes your whole perspective, when you do further education in psychology. So, I'm excited for that. And it's taught by a black professor, which is very rare. I think I've had one black professor out of all my quarters, and I always take over fifteen units. So, I'm taking four to five classes every quarter since my second quarter here. So yeah, being in the psych department's cool. I like learning about psychology and why we make the decisions.

But I do think, not just the psych department here, but in psychology, the entire study, it's not very well-versed in why certain racial groups have certain tendencies. I think the history of certain groups is very overlooked, and post-traumatic stress syndrome. I recently read about that, and I was like, wow, my life has changed. That stuff's not mentioned. It's like oh, no, it's because they were whipped when they were a child. It's just very difficult for me. I feel like I'm forced to apply certain theories and stuff on people, and that probably isn't the reason why

they're doing certain things. And it's like, "Well this is why black males go to prison a lot." We're not looking at the system that's put in place.

Critical Race and Ethnic Studies (CRES)

So that's kind of why I got into CRES, critical race and ethnic studies, because we don't have black studies, which we've been asking for, for years. So, I felt like CRES was like, "Okay, you've got some type of racial thing, be quiet." So that's kind of why I got into CRES, because I was like, well, it's an easy-ish major, and so far, it's the only class where I've talked about black people in every single class. And all my work since my second quarter here has been always tied to the black community or people of color or something like that.

Vanderscoff: So you're talking about two very different experiences of majors, right, the difference between critical race and ethnic studies and then psych. So, I'm curious, then, when you think about your education here, do these seem like two different things? Or can you find ways to put them in this curriculum that you're getting in this psych class, you know, this very white-centric curriculum you're getting there, and then the stuff you're getting out of CRES?

Brookins: Oh yeah, I always intertwine them, especially since I was like, you know what? I'm going to be a psych *and* CRES major. That's when I started writing papers about, for example, the social and moral effects on, or costs of mass incarceration on black men. And then in that, I talked about the psychological damage that prison does to black men specifically, or Latinx men. So, a lot of my papers have to do with the mental health due to this certain thing that's been inflicted on this community. Because I learned that in CRES, and then I also learned what certain things, such as what happens, that's explained in CRES, you know—why their psyche is like that, or why mental health issues come up a lot in certain communities more than others. So like, access to resources: which communities have it, which communities don't? And what does that do psychologically? I always usually tie it back. I write a lot of papers about the prison system and how it's messed up.

So I don't think it's hard at all. I think there are people out there, people writing articles and doing research on that, on those specific topics. It's just hard when I try to force it into the prompt. I find a way, no matter what the prompt is, to somehow mesh it in there.

Vanderscoff: That's what I'm interested in. So, you're doing this sort of work, and I'm wondering what your thoughts are as to why that isn't already more of a place in particularly in the psych curriculum, based on your experience of certain classes or your fellow students?

Brookins: Why it's not already?

Vanderscoff: Yeah, yeah.

Brookins: Well, I feel like these type of questions you need to ask, I have to ask. In CRES, we can have the deep conversations about why that is. And it's not just for the black community. And that's another problem I see, is that there's not enough students in CRES; you know what I mean? It's usually black students and Latinx students. Middle Eastern students. But I feel like the people who really need that education are not there. I mean, I could take it historically and just be like no, we were never represented. Like communities are not represented in building a certain book like the psychology book. The intro to psychology coursework—it's not engraved in there and they don't take into account the students that are actually going to be in the class. And like yeah, there's a few chocolate drops and caramel drops and stuff like that in class. But for the most part, it's a vanilla shake. I know why it's not there. But maybe no students have expressed concern. We're not represented; you should have some type of outside reading, something. There's a ton of articles on it. You could easily just put it in there and they would read about it. Because they don't. Like if not us, then who? Because nobody talks about it.

Vanderscoff: So you've just started as a research assistant on a new study which is maybe bringing in some of these themes about social justice. So specifically, the quote that I found [online is that] it's "focusing on the social, academic, financial, etc. barriers for students who do

not finish obtaining their degree and how this university can address it." So, I'm really curious, I don't know if you've been doing that too long, but I'm curious about what that project is, and if you could talk about your own role in that.

Brookins: So this particular study is hosting interviews with near-finishers, which are people who don't finish school for whatever reason. And it's required that it includes all races. So, for example, there's a Latinx student. I think some of them are in group meetings, and some of them are not. But there was a group meeting with Latinx students. And they were talking about immigrating to here and having a ton of siblings. Almost dropping out, or dropping out or things like that. And then in comparison, there was a white student who was like, "Yeah, I just couldn't handle rugby and school, so I dropped out." But it's required to include that stuff. So, I'm just like, are you kidding me? So basically, we're transcribing those interviews. But it's anonymous unless—I mean, some of the people I can recognize their voices, so I know who they are. But you're not allowed to speak on it, which makes sense. So, it's pretty much transcribing a ton of interviews that are done by the graduate student. And myself and the [another] undergrad are transcribing it. And then I believe we're going to highlight and pull out what is the reason for these students not finishing, why are they almost finished? We're going to be reaching out to students who left and didn't come back, and telling them like, "Look, this is what we have here. We're willing to help you come back and this is what you'll need to do. You're almost there, you can do it," kind of thing—almost like retaining your finishers, pretty much. And I do believe there's a chance for me to either sit in a meeting, or present with the grad student the results that we find pretty much, to faculty, I believe. I'm not sure where it goes from there. But I'm just a transcriber, really, and hearing other students' struggles and stuff as to why they don't finish.

I think there's a lot of things that the university could do. Like the fact that it's student-initiated outreach—it's not like, "This university cares so we're going to have this program." These are students who are fighting for certain programs to happen because the university doesn't do it.

Vanderscoff: So tell me a little bit more, then, about getting more closely acquainted with your fellow students' views on that through the transcription work. What's that doing for your own take on this? I mean, it's interesting, you're in that kind of close—transcription is an intimate thing.

Brookins: Yeah, it's like (makes backspace noise) blah, blah, blah (backspace noise) like I have to keep, because it's all really precise. You've got to do the pauses; there's certain symbols and all that. I didn't realize that. I guess it gives me more research ideas. Just ideas. I feel like when I finish, I can probably write out certain things and then research that. Or come up with my own project, or something that needs to be funded to get these things to happen. Or I could take it, actually, like some students are undocumented. I could take some things like themes I come out with and give it to Undocumented Services. But there's that. There's if I recognize that the student comes from a certain community, I could come out with the themes. And I'm also an intern for the African American Resource and Cultural Center. Very recently, actually. So, I could use that and use it to come up with programs that might help the community. Yeah, I guess it just makes me more aware of the problems within different communities, as well as my own, and ways to help out.

Vanderscoff: And so that actually leads us into our next topic. One thing I did want to ask briefly before that is just when it comes to the nature of the feedback that you get, do narrative evaluations still play any sort of role? What kind of feedback are you getting from your faculty? And then what sort of impact is that having?

Brookins: In terms of how I transcribe?

Vanderscoff: Well, just in general. Because this campus had, for a long time you would get evaluations. When I was here, until my junior year, you'd get written evaluations for every class that you took. And that's now optional.

Brookins: What? Like any class?

Vanderscoff: You'd get like a paragraph about you at the end of it.

Brookins: How do you—yeah, they don't do that. How do I make sure they do that?

Vanderscoff: It's interesting. We'll have to look into it.

Brookins: Because I want that. (laughter)

Vanderscoff: (laughs) When I was here, there was a way in which you could request that they do it. So anyway—

Brookins: Wow. No, I guess the way I find out if the professor liked me or not is if I ask at the end, like, "If I ever need a letter of recommendation," that type of thing. That's not really a thing anymore. If it is, they don't tell you about it. Because I didn't know that. But for the most part, with certain professors that I do connect with, I keep in contact pretty much. Like for a lot of these, like the research assistant, or for the internship, for the mentor; I'm going to be the RA for RPAATH next year—woot, woot. 'So I turn to professors from core, or from previous classes, that knew me very well. So that's, I guess that's how I get my feedback.

Activism and Community Involvement

Vanderscoff: That's great—that's really good to know. So, the next theme that I have here is college advocacy and then activist involvement. And we've been touching on all this—I don't think it's separate from all the things that you're talking about. I mean, these things are all hand-in-hand with your studies. But I wanted to ask you to relate to a statement that's on your Facebook, which is that, "I come from a lineage of survivors." I'm interested in that idea of bringing that lineage with you. So, if you could just talk a little bit about what that statement means to you, and then if you could connect that out or build that out to some of the particular areas of community involvement that you've had here.

Brookins: It's going to be a long answer. I'm trying to remember where I even came across that quote. But I noticed a friend had a quote on theirs and I was like wow, that's cool. I want one. So I was thinking I want one that basically speaks on me as a whole without having to really know me. 'And so, "I come from a lineage of survivors" refers back to that experience I had at DHE. Like some survived—some didn't. I feel like it's easier for me, or certain students who identify in a certain community, to really have strong emotions and attachment to the history of their people. So, when I was learning about Malcolm X, there were times I'd get really freaking angry, because he was assassinated. MLK was assassinated. Every time there's some sort of leader, they're killed. I believe the government killed him. But that's just my thoughts.

And it's just this accumulation of anger, and why is it that all these things are in place to stop people from coming to the top and being the boss and stuff like that? So, it's just really paying respects to my ancestors. I believe a lot in things falling into place because my ancestors fuck with me. I say that a lot. I'm like, "Man, my ancestors fuck with me." Because like, I mean, seriously, like I landed this research assistantship. I was just complaining to my mom, "Mom, I need to do something in the psych department but I want it to be specific to issues." And then this graduate student, black graduate student, was like, "Hey, I have a research opportunity." Just like that.

I got the RA position for next year; I got the mentorship for this year. I was going to quit. I was not going to be the RA. I was like no, I can't, I've been doing too much. I need a break. And then boom, this black alumni from UC Santa Cruz came out here for Stevenson plenary. That's another thing. I was chosen to speak on a student panel at the Stevenson plenary about Black Lives Matter and stuff like that, little things that kept happening: you need to be here, we need you here, you need to—and like now this is a mentor of mine who not only convinced me to be the RA, but also reminded me of that passion that I have for the black community in particular, and why I am the best fit for that position. And a lot of times when I was like, oh, I'm going to

not do it, something came up. And I was like, okay, ancestors. That's just my little thing that I say a lot.

And just like even yesterday, I have random thoughts about, for example, I was carrying a picture, a portrait or something, with my phone and my keys. And I was like, man, this is heavy! I was like, what are you talking about? This is not heavy. I started reflecting back to movies I had seen, or things I had read, where there were white men who had enslaved Africans hold big logs for hours. And then as soon as they dropped it, like they're freaking whipped. Those are the things that come into my head and I'm like, what are you complaining about? That's why I hate when people complain about little, little, little things. Like yeah, I want you all to have your phones, but let's pay our respects to our ancestors. Why are you here? How did you get here? Through much worse hell than that, what you're going through. Not to minimize people's feelings, because they're totally valid. But don't make it seem like it's like the end of the world. That's why when people are like, "Well, if I was a slave, I would have ran away." You can't put yourself in that position because you never will be in that position, hopefully. And just little things like that. And how can you white people say, "If I was back then, I wouldn't have stood in a picture where they're lynching a black person." And I'm like, "You can't really say that because you've got to put it into perspective. I'm not saying you're a racist. But you've got to think about, like, your parents are for it. Your grandparents are for it. It's like, there were very few that were down with the movement." But I don't like when people try to say, "Well, if I was there, I would have." Well, you can't, because you weren't, and you aren't, so stop.

I really believe in paying respect to your ancestors because I was in a class recently and we were talking about an issue that we wanted to do in a group. And we chose color, which is huge, right? Across all people. You have to figure out the roots. So, I started going on. I was like, "White supremacy. Inequality. Slavery. Divide and conquer. Racism. Privilege." All this stuff. And one of the students in my group was like, "I know you're supposed to pay attention

to your ancestors. But let's think of present day." I was like, "First of all, how did we get here? Our history. Okay. Enough said. I don't want to hear you try to minimize what's happened in the past because you're not comfortable. You can never say the present day has nothing to do with the history. Because if you don't know where you came from, where are you going?" So that's what that quote really means.

I think the second part of the question was my activism?

Vanderscoff: Yeah, And, one concrete way to do this, if you think about your ancestors, part of what you're talking about is making space to honor the value and eloquence of black lives in this country, right? And so maybe one way to get into this is you mentioned you were on the BLM plenary, the student plenary, at this event. So maybe you could talk a little bit about that and then we'll expand from there.

Brookins: Man, that was, I was literally told like four days before it. I went home that weekend. So I was like, "Dad, Dad, help me make a speech." So, I made a ten-minute speech. I was like ready. I was like, okay, I got this. I was excited because I was like Stevenson needs this, because last year during plenary for this one, we brought in Alicia Garza, one of the Black Lives Matter founders. And wow, it got a lot of backlash. I was furious. A lot of the students were really bold that next day in core, like that next week, the next two weeks: talking mad shit about what she said, how she's incorrect, her sources are not valid. She said the first cops were slave catchers. They were literally white men who'd go run around grabbing up black people and killing them, lynching them, beating them, stuff like that. That's the original police. There was somebody who was like, "That's absolutely incorrect. It comes from England." Blah, blah, blah. And there's usually only one black student in each core class, including myself. And it was just really bad. A lot of black students felt really attacked. They were always the only one in there trying to speak up and some of the instructors weren't doing anything. So I was like wow, Stevenson, you all can't handle this.

So that's why this year it was a plenary more so on the history of the black power movement here, which is huge and nobody knows about it.

Vanderscoff: Here in—

Brookins: Here at UC Santa Cruz. There's Huey Newton, but there's so much more that nobody knows about. So there was that. There was talk about R.PAATH, how it came about, why it's here. We even had a white student up there who's a really good friend of mine, who lived in R.PAATH as well and talked about their experience living there, why we need it. And it was like, the people in the audience needed to see somebody who looked like them to kind of be like okay, "Mm hmm, I totally understand and get it." Like that. Versus me, because I was just like going on and on. And come to find out, I only had three minutes to speak, not ten. Nobody gave me a time. So, I was freaking out. But then once I got up there, it was just questions and it just came out naturally. And then afterwards, a lot of students came up to me, even some instructors, talking to me like, "That was amazing. "You all should do this for every college. This is necessary," blah, blah, blah. And that's how I met my mentor. Because they were up there, and then they recognized how I'm really, really passionate. And they're like, "Oh, are you going to be the RA?" I was like, "Hmm, I don't know." And then we had this long talk, and I'm going to be the RA. So, I'm excited to do that.

I'm going to be honest, I forgot the question. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: (laughs) No, no, you answered it. But speaking about your role in terms of community advocacy and activism, you've spoken to this a lot already, but there's a couple different points here. One thing is relating it out to larger social movements, like Black Lives Matter, and then also looking inwards, towards things like the Rosa Parks House. But if you could maybe chart the story of that involvement at UCSC—

Brookins: I'm just going to start going down the line chronologically. Okay. So, I came here, did DHE; did the bus chaperone to retain black students. I did a lot of tours for black students. Something I do, especially now, in spring specifically, when they have like Spring Spotlight, I always, if I see a black student or a group of black students touring, or a group of Latinx students—it's a lot of times, whether it's black students or Latinx students, there's students of color in a group, coming from a low-income area. I always go to them. I don't care if I have class. I don't care if I had an interview like this—I will stop and I tell them about all the resource centers. I tell them about all the organizations, all of the retention programs. I just lay it down and then I leave. So that's something I'm constantly doing throughout the year.

Vanderscoff: You mentioned that you had this incredible experience initially, but then found it quite difficult adjusting, and then found community, in a sense. So, what kind of advice do you give prospective students of color, and then particularly black students, when it comes to coming here? Should they do so? And if so, how do you find a place here?

Brookins: Definitely the first thing I say is like, "Hey, we're here!" I definitely let them know. I'm not going to lie. I'm like super real. I'm just like, "There's not many of us," us as a collective, "but we're here." And make sure that we're visible. And that's when I start talking about how they can get involved, the resources, the retention programs. I give them my contact information if they want to have more tours and stuff. Like being an intern at the African American Resource, the AARC, a lot of times we'll get emails about hey, I have this group of young elementary students, or middle school, or high school. And we set up tours; we set up panels and stuff like that. So, I'm becoming more and more familiar with how to approach people and sometimes parents. I met this son and his mom, I was like, "Hi, I'm a second-year," basically the introduction I gave you. And then first I ask them, "Did they tell you anything?" It's always no. "No, they didn't tell us about the DRC. No, they didn't tell us about this resource center; they didn't tell us about this organization." I'm like, "That's like a big problem." That's when people say, "Oh, you should be a tour guide." I'm like, "No, because I

would not say what they want me to say." So that's why I participate in things like Black Academy. It's a very, very new program. It's for students, ABC students, African black Caribbean identifying students who have already signed their intent to come here. And they come a week before school starts and they move in early. It's all free and stuff. They have workshops. They have a student panel. They have tour guides who don't have to follow the rules, which I will be doing. They have mentors, which I just applied for this last night. And this time it's a paid position.

So things like that are what I participate in—DHE, Black Academy, Spring Spotlight, being at resource fairs as an AARC representative, or R.PAATH representative. And even though I'm the R.PAATH mentor, I'm really the mentor for any students who need it, particularly first-years this year, since I'm just a second year.

There was a student here who I met on Black Academy last year. And this student needed DRC accommodations due to a, I guess you'd say, walking disability. And I told them, "Look, this university really is not too friendly with people who have physical disabilities." They had no idea what the DRC was. No idea what the van pool was. I had my car. So, I drove them to the DRC. I sat there in a meeting with them. I got them to do whatever paperwork they needed to make sure they got to a class from Oakes to Crown on time. It was just little things like that. These are things that students need to know about, and a lot of students don't. So that's why I try, when I have conversations with students, I try to make them more aware of every single resource. Because I know a lot of people think like the DRC is only for mental or physical. But it's also like, I cannot take this class. A lot of people undermine their little things that they have trouble with. Like they can't take multiple choice tests. They just can't. 'For whatever reason. They can take a non-multiple choice test in a room by themselves. There are all these different accommodations that people overlook, just for one example.

But in terms of my other activism with the larger community, it has a lot to do with the other retention programs. So that's why we coexist with each other and collaborate with each other. And when there's actions on campus, we have the big five, which is the big five [ethnic] boards who have representatives who come together. They have meetings, they talk. They talk about what each other need, if they need help, if they need support, stuff like that. So being involved with that is pretty cool.

R.PAATH mentor, R.PAATH RA next year. I'm the retention outreach officer for BSU, which is Black Students United. So that's another form of retention. For ABSA this year, the African Black Student Alliance, I was the ABC rep. ABC is the Afrikan Black Coalition. So the ABC rep, there's two of us. We come up with the funds, the itinerary, the bus schedule. Like super stressful, but worth it. We take the delegation from UC Santa Cruz, whoever applies and gets in, to the ABC conference, which is the Afrikan Black Coalition conference. Happens every year. This past year it was at a CSU for the first year. It's where seven to nine hundred black students from all over the state come together and have workshops, political consciousness. We have guest speakers. This past year we had Louis Farrakhan, who I guess is really big. Was he problematic? Yes. That's okay. (laughs) So I was like the ABC rep these past few quarters. And, woo, it was very stressful. But I made it, and we got it. Will I do it again? I don't know. But I'm thinking of maybe next year being the ABSA treasurer, or the ABSA secretary, or something. I want to continue to be involved somehow.

Vanderscoff: So when it comes to all these events, I'm curious about what sort of a dynamic you've experienced with staff and administration. That could be staff at the Resource Centers, or it could be the administration when it comes to putting on certain events. We've talked about faculty a little bit, so I'd like to talk about that side of things.

Brookins: Okay. For the most part, all of the black staff that are in contact with the black orgs or black students are very supportive. They're willing to cancel classes and just stuff like that. I

know, referring back to that fall quarter my first year, that protest that we had, sitting in solidarity, Angela Davis was actually here that time. And she allowed us to go into her lecture. She just stood back and let us do things. So it's like small things like that that really: we're just like, "Oh, cool, we actually have support." There are faculty who are not black, as well, who are very supportive and are always asking, "What can we do? What can we do?"

I think there should be a little more transparency. We have to constantly figure out what are we allowed to do? What can we do? A lot of faculty here know we could really do anything we want. But we just need that support and that guidance, really. So turning to faculty is like a big deal.

Also, turning to other UCs and their black student unions and some of their faculty. Like for example, we want a black studies department here. So we reach out to a lot of faculty here. We reach out to other faculty from other UCs: how do we do this? How do we get it done? We reach out to alumni who work at the White House, or work at other really important places who have power.

So for the most part, it's really cool. You've really got to know that person, though. Because some professors I've run into who really seem at first like, "Yeah, fuck the prison system! But racism is not the worst thing in the world." So, there's stuff like that. You've got to watch out for that. But other than that, the faculty are really, really cool and supportive.

Vanderscoff: And so when you talk with students who are involved in black student organizations in other UCs or at other colleges, do you get a sense of what the particular set of issues are at UCSC, for you as a black student, or for the community in general?

Brookins: Yeah, last year, to be really specific, there were really big issues with colorism. Huge. So, huge to the point that this year at ABC there were students from other UCs, like, "Are you all still having a problem with colorism, UC Santa Cruz? Are you all good yet?"

That's how big it can get sometimes. So sometimes discussions are not held correctly. Sometimes there's hostile situations. Just because a lot of people think "Oh, like everybody holds hands at Santa Cruz. It's Kumbaya." No, we're also humans and we have differing opinions and stuff like that. So, it's like we do recognize there's that from last year.

Vanderscoff: So what leads to something like that happening, and then what becomes of that? How does the community work through something like that?

Brookins: It's pretty much the, I guess you'd say the diaspora of blackness. It's huge. Like there's me, black and Mexican. There's like, "I'm Nigerian; there's oh, my dad's from Louisiana and my mom's from Virginia." Like African American or being African or Afro-Latinx. There's a huge, huge spectrum. So we all come from different places and different backgrounds. So sometimes being here is the first time a black person's blackness is questioned. Or, for example, a student who was black and Asian was told, "You're not black enough. You're not even black" type of thing. And it's like, well, I've never, like back home, what do you mean? I'm black always. There's no questioning." But then here, they could be ignorant to the fact of what colorism is like. If they're light-skinned, they might be like, "What are you talking about? I don't know what you're talking about. I don't have no privilege." But you've got to recognize that some people do have it over. Across all cultures, darker people are discriminated against. Like in India, here, even in some of Africa, because there are lighter-skinned Africans in certain countries in Africa, and there's darker skinned. So, it's being exposed to something for the first time that's completely different than what they have known. It's all different levels of wokeness. And so, we all got to own up to that.

So that was a kind of big deal. Because a lot of people knew about it. A lot of the, not professors, the leadership in the black community here knew about it and stuff. So, the way we overcame that was having multiple discussions. We had diversity officers coming in and we had certain faculty come in. It was tons of big group meetings and discussions. We had, I think

last quarter at the end of it, the black leadership meeting, where we all openly discussed what was the problem, how are we going to go past it and stuff. It's like that. It's just like, "Look, at the end of the day, we're all black. Let's just move on. The university is already going to fuck with us, so let's figure out how to be friends again." '

Finding Balance

Vanderscoff: So I have a question that maybe takes it back more specifically to you, which is a question of balance. So, you're doing all of this advocacy and activist work, and it's extraordinary, but you're also a second-year student. You're still on the earlier part of your education here. And I'm curious then about what are the practices, or who are the people that sustain you here? So, this could be in terms of a habit that you have, in terms of people who are around you—how do you keep all that going in balance? Or do you, right?

Brookins: No. (laughter) That's a good question. It's taken me a long while to figure that out. Because I know my first quarter, I was, it was my first time away from home for such a long time. So, I was all over the place. I was like, whoa, need to wake up. And then on top of that, there's outside stressors, like, "Mom, you can't pay this quarter, what are you doing?" "Don't worry about it, honey. Don't worry about it." I'm like, how am I not supposed to worry? So, then I'm like oh, I need this book, but I don't want to ask my mom because she doesn't have money. I'm going to ask somebody else for it. Who do I turn to? There's a certain area by the financial aid office where you can go there and say, "I cannot afford this." Or the DRC. '"I cannot afford this. Like, I'm going to drop out" type of thing. And they'll like happily assist you. So, turning to resource centers. CAPS definitely saved my ass, like heavy; after the first loss, I figured out there was a grief group that they had. And I've been a part of it since that next quarter that my cousin had died.

So basically, turning to my resources, constantly calling back home. My dad and I became best friends over these past few years because he's the black parent who will more so relate to what

the hell I'm going through out here. He's always spitting knowledge, and spitting pep talks and encouraging me. And just having people who might be from Sacramento to talk to. Friends back home; it's nice. Taking time for self-care. That's something; that's a huge thing I've recently, like oh, that's all that matters. Last quarter was my first quarter getting straight As, and I wanted to cry. Because I was taking two upper divs for both my majors. And they were both the courses that you have to pass in order to, not declare, but move on to higher courses and stuff. And that was because I literally had great time management skills. I basically didn't go out. I still had a social life. I just always picked finishing my work over going out to eat, or going downtown just for fun. After my first year I realized, that's money I don't have, and that's time I don't have, to just give up like that. So, maintaining my sanity as well as my academics.

This quarter, I'm doing a lot. I'm taking 24 units. Because of the internship and because of the research assistant thing. Like this RA class I have to take. These are all extra things. So, my supervisor's like, "Yo, let me know if you need help." They're always offering, "What way can I support you? Don't burn yourself out." Stuff like that. And so, having the people that are essentially like my boss or my professors, I let them know ahead of time. Like, "Hey, I have a lot going on. So, if I don't finish this," this is why type of thing.

But basically, taking responsibility, and always reminding myself why I'm here. There's a quote that I love. It says, "When you feel like quitting, remember why you started." And so, that always reflects back to my younger sister. She's eight. She's already woke. Like my dad is teaching her things I didn't know till college. So that reminds me, she's always looking up to me. She's always calling me. She's always like, "Sareil, when are you coming home? What's your homework like?" Stuff like that. There are times, the first time she ever called me when I was out here my first year. I was bawling. I was just like wow, this hurts my feelings. But it was also a way to motivate me and be like, this is why you're here. You know, my mom didn't do this; my dad didn't do this. There was nobody to ask. So, I'm going to be that example.

Financial Struggles

Vanderscoff: Something that you brought up that I'd like to talk a little bit about is the financial aspect of attending UCSC, paying for a college education in a time of tuition increases, in a place where housing is not super affordable and is getting pricier, and the idea of student loan debt has become increasingly normalized. So, anything you'd like to say about the economic dimension of your student experience—

Brookins: That is always on my mind. I am very frugal. I've always been frugal since forever. I mean, I'm a yard sale, thrift store, hand-me-down girl. All my life, we shared hand-me-downs. This shirt, hand me down. Six bucks, this hat. I'm reaching out for free things. I was trained like that by my mom. I've been going to yard sales and being really cheap since then. I realize that it's really expensive here, but I do also realize they give a lot of aid, in my opinion, here. But it also depends on how much money you make. So, for example, I couldn't be part of EOP because my mom makes a lot of money. However, sometimes the university recognizes that and they're like, okay, you don't have to pay this much. Or I always email this person, I don't know her position, but she is like, "Would you like your payments split up in thirds? Would you like to pay upfront?" And I always say thirds, because my mom could actually save up and then pay it, and save up some more and pay it. So that's really helpful, there's different payment options. It is overall really expensive, no matter who you are. Maybe not so much—there are some people here who can afford it. I've heard many talk of, "My dad just got back from Barcelona" or something. And then their friend's like, "What?" "Yeah, it was just a regular thing." I was like, damn, what? That's amazing.

It's just little things like that. I realize how dedicated I am to school and how dedicated I have to be. My first mistake was first quarter, first year, going to Literary Guillotine [bookstore for textbooks]—that shit's expensive. I was like, "What is a reader? Why is it sixty bucks? Why is this little thirteen-chapter book so much money?" And sometimes I feel like the professors aim

to make your wallet dry. But in ways of combatting that, I found the free and for sale site for UCSC students, the UCSC page. We're all struggling students, so we recognize that. So, we'll be like, "Hey, I'm selling these books." Or I'll sell my books. It's like this little cycle.

I'm not lazy. I just like doing things in my room all the time. So when it comes to like, "Oh, I have a book on reserve." Oh, okay, I guess I'm going to the library and reading it in that time because I'm not going to pay sixty-four dollars for not even a textbook. I rent my textbooks. I try to see if people have a pdf and then pay them five bucks, ten bucks, that type of thing. I'll just go to the library instead, I hate it, but I'm going to do it. Because I get tired of asking my mom for money all the time. So, the financial's always on my mind, for sure. Especially this year—I'm trying to do summer classes. I've never done it. I haven't been in a triple since my first year and I don't want to be in a triple. And my triple was huge. It was like from that outlet to the end of this table. It was a large triple.

Vanderscoff: How big do we think that is, for the audio, feet-wise? (laughs)

Brookins: I don't know. It was huge. I can't think of, I can't count that. But, that's why I'm not a math major.

Vanderscoff: Fifteen foot—yeah, amen. (laughs)

Brookins: So I applied to be a summer RA this year, because I'm like, I want a single. I mean, I'll live off campus, I don't care. Like no matter what, I find certain financial helping outlets, I guess. So last year I found out I could be the mentor of R.PAATH. When you're a mentor, you get housing. You don't get free housing; you get housing discounts. So, I'm in a single, because I had priority housing. So, last year I signed up for the single that I'm in. Then I got the mentorship position, which deducts money from your housing. So the price I'm paying this year for my single is the exact same price I paid last year for my large triple. So, there was no like jump like, oh, a single! So, for next year, I'm going to be the RA. That's free housing and

free food. Whatever I need to do to make it easier. The opportunities are out there. My mom is always saying, "Apply for scholarships." I just don't have time for that. But that's also a good idea, is to apply for scholarships all the time.

The Town of Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: Yeah, I just want to talk briefly about your experience of UCSC's context, which is this city, or—we were joking about this—to you, the *town* of Santa Cruz. (laughs)

Brookins: Right, the town.

Vanderscoff: Just what relevance that is. And that could be anything from friends' places, to community spaces, to the beach.

Brookins: The town of Santa Cruz, it's hella white. There's certain parts where you go and there are Latinx, and I love that. But downtown, it's not always that comfortable. I've had friends been kicked out of stores because they were talking too loud. And it wasn't a library—these were black students. And you know, they asked why and they don't give them answers. "Just get out of my store." Or there was a student who I'm a mentor for in R.PAATH and they are Nigerian. They're darker skinned. And they were walking with a friend of theirs who's Afro-Latinx. This is like Ocean Street or something. And there is a car of two white men who basically drove up next to them and called them "fucking niggers" and then drove off. This was on that student's birthday, and that was their first time going off campus. And this was a first-year student. So, I was like, damn, that sucks. I was so angry, I was just like, what? I can't really control this actual city, because it's just so weird. I think this town is really weird, if I'm honest. I think it's weird that everything closes early. I think it's weird that nobody's really out at certain times. I think there's something going on. I don't know if it still is, but there was a KKK headquarters that had a Confederate flag out there. I've driven by it and stuff. So that bothers me. I know there's—

Vanderscoff: Down Highway 1 a little ways, maybe you're thinking of?

Brookins: I don't know, I think it's on Highway 1. It's on the way to Monterey.

Vanderscoff: Yeah.

Brookins: That really creepy road.

Vanderscoff: It's like a little surplus store. Yeah, yeah, I know what you're talking about.

Brookins: So just knowing that gives me a general idea of the people I'm around. I'm really careful when I'm in the city. I'm not just like, oh yeah, carefree. I do recognize the homeless population and I feel like a lot of native people here, who are from Santa Cruz and stuff, don't really care for them. I notice when they just ignore them. When I walk by, they're like the sweetest people. I have run into a few who are not sweet. That's okay.

There's a lot of volunteering opportunities in the city of Santa Cruz. There are classes here that you can take that require you to volunteer, which I did, this fall quarter. I volunteered at the veterans' center. I fed them food. I actually did a mini project with a friend of mine. We interviewed them on being a veteran and what do they need as a veteran. That had a lot to do with psychology. Because there are a lot of effects on their psyche and stuff when they go to war and when they come back and the government treats them like shit. And a lot of times they get really amped up and I have to keep my composure. Yeah, I was kind of scared, but how else are they going to express their anger? I felt terrible. I was just like, this is so shitty. And I do believe there's actually a veterans' oral history going on, either down there or here. There's some new project going on. I cannot think of it. But there's a lot of opportunities to volunteer. There are elementary schools you can volunteer at. There's the little fake aquarium that we have, Exploratorium. You can volunteer there. You can volunteer a lot of places. But it's really weird.

I don't really like driving here. Because I hate how Mission Street—it bothers me that there's no middle turning lane, so when you turn there's no waiting anywhere in the middle. And when you've got to turn, you're going to hold up everybody and their mama because there's no turning lane.

But the Museum of Art and History, I think that's a very, very, very important place to go to because of the very racist history of Santa Cruz amongst Chinese immigrants and the native people, oh my gosh, even the black folks—there's not that much. But it's terrible. There's little gems here. You've just got to find them.

Vanderscoff: And so for you, then, when you balance these experiences, like your friends getting kicked out of stores, or your friend being called the "N" word on Ocean Street—but then you have this flipside of volunteering, of being part of the community in a really involved way, in the sense that you're engaging with the veterans. So what's the balance, then, for you in terms of thinking about, like, is the city of Santa Cruz a space for you, or a safe space? What is your relationship to the town?

Brookins: Well, being in Santa Cruz has definitely helped me appreciate Sacramento a lot. I get really excited going home. I don't like the weather here, where you're cold all the time. Like, I'm cold right now. I'm always cold out here. So, I don't really like the weather. I don't really like how it's not diverse. So, I feel like that's a big part of where I need to be if I'm going to be living somewhere. It's— I'm fine. I'm surviving, whatever. But if I'm going to graduate school, I'm going to make sure I research the demographics of that city, and the size, and like everything. Because I think it's livable, but I also feel like Santa Cruz is a vacation type of town. I forget that people actually grew up here and went to elementary school and high school. I forget people really live here. Then I'm like whoa, that's weird. I assume everybody I see that's young are college students.

Yeah, I guess my relationship is: it's really just a college, my college destination. It's not somewhere I would live because it's just not diverse enough, in my opinion. I want to be able to see someone on my street, at least, who is a person of color. And that's not very prominent here. The beaches are nice. But, I mean, my ex-boyfriend and I would walk down the street sometimes, and there are children here who stare at us like, whoa! "What is that? I've never seen someone like that!" So that bothered me.

And then this past spring break I went to Atlanta. I'm not sure if you've visited Atlanta before. But that is literally chocolate city. So being there and then coming back here, I was like, yeah, this is definitely not a place for me to permanently live, ever. And I've always wanted to go to Atlanta. I wanted to go to Atlanta for school, actually. But my parents were like, "Oh, that's too far. That's too expensive." So, I am thinking about going there for a master's or something. But just somewhere where there's, not necessarily—it doesn't have to be a majority of black people. But I need there to be more color.

The other day I was walking up toward Science Hill from Kresge, and there was a group of elementary school students—they were all black. And I wanted to cry. I was just like, you should be happy. I was like, oh my gosh, black children! Like just children in general, they're so happy and smiling and carefree. And for some reason that was very therapeutic. And I was like, wow, I just feel warm and fuzzy inside, and I feel like the Grinch just getting his feelings back. I was like, wow, there is humanity. There's hope! Just seeing children smiling and people who look like me. And dogs—I freak out when I see dogs. I want to hug them and steal them from their owner. Just like little things, like not being able to see that—I rarely see that in the city of Santa Cruz itself. So, when I go back, I'm just like wow, this is beautiful. Look, elementary children. Look, a mall. Anything close in vicinity that has to do with like family or things like that, I didn't realize how much I appreciated it till I got here and I was like, wow.

Vanderscoff: So one thing we haven't touched on is what sort of a role does your social life play in either bringing some of that home to you, or creating some sort of a new home. You've mentioned you're real busy, too. (laughs)

Brookins: My social life plays a huge role. Having people to go to, whether or not it's like people here, or people back home, but having somebody to talk to that's not a CAPS person, or not a supervisor. A friend, or a boyfriend or a best friend, anything. Even when we do icebreakers in classes and stuff. Having that just nice, genuine talk with people is really, really awesome, and reminds me that, okay, I'm not the only one going through this. Because I feel like we look like robots out there sometimes. So I remind me that we're humans. We're all struggling college students. So yeah, my social life is really important. But I do have a way of incorporating it with like my internship. Maybe I won't hang out with anybody outside of school for a week, or the whole quarter, but I do have people who I work with who *are* my social life, if that makes sense.

National Politics

Vanderscoff: It does. And so, something that I think we'd be remiss not to mention, I was thinking in preparing for this interview, in my sophomore year here, Obama was elected.

Brookins: Oh, fuck. Yeah, oh, man. I've got to talk about that.

Vanderscoff: Right, and in your sophomore year, of course, we have Trump. And I was reflecting on just what a different orientation that is, for just a sense of what the direction of the country is regarding social justice. So, I'm curious, could you walk through the election, Trump, and what the impact of that was for you here and the community.

Brookins: Oh my gosh, I cannot believe I just forgot about that. That was a really shitty time. That was first quarter—everybody was dreading it. That was the talk of the town. I was in CRES 10. There was an open Trump supporter there who was always just nagging and always

being extremely Republican, I guess. Or like, almost not Republican. I felt like this is a new, weird thing. That was really difficult.

Actually, first quarter in R.PAATH, somebody tore down the Black Lives Matter poster on my neighbor's door. Tore it and then left it on the floor. Erased their white board, erased my white board. I have no idea why because I didn't do anything. And that was the weekend I went home because my grandpa had died. So, I was like, I don't have time for this. And also, somebody tore down the Rosa Parks—we have a big poster. Somebody tore that down. So, the RAs are completely stressed out. Why do people hate us? Somebody had the "N" word with the E-R in their Wi-Fi name in R.PAATH. So, there's been like constant— And then all we get is a freaking email, "Stevenson is a very diverse community, be aware of that." But we get mass emails, like, "Oh my gosh, don't hit Hank the turkey. Don't hit Hank. Oh, my goodness, please be careful of this turkey," who, you know, attacks cars.

Vanderscoff: Who's Hank the turkey? (laughs)

Brookins: Oh, Hank is the turkey that lives in Stevenson with like a family of freaking twenty. And he will attack your tires and jump on the hood of your cars and just be a little boss and sit there. And he literally was rolled under somebody's wheel and everybody freaked out. He's totally fine. But we got a mass email. Or we get mass emails about, "Oh, somebody's bike was stolen. Please be on the lookout for this." But then when all that shit happened in R.PAATH, where was the support? Like there should have been—like students, we in the house had to come up with, okay, we're going to meet with the students in the house that identify as ABC every weekend to see how they're feeling. We had to go out of our way and come up with things.

Oh, Trump, that sucker—so leading up to the actual election, I was always calling my dad, getting really worried. Because I was like, there's so much shit happening in the world. I don't know if you heard about it. Here there was a student, I don't remember— She was a female. I

believe they said the race, I don't remember. But there was rocks thrown at the back of her head while she was walking in the Quarry, or something like that. There was a lot more occurrences of hate crimes, essentially, and things like that.

And when it came down to that [election] day, boy, it was wild. The campus was just—everybody was anticipating something. Everybody was hoping Hillary would win. But then when she didn't, everybody, thousands came to the quarry. And even that was a problem, because it was just a whole bunch of white students up there speaking. And when somebody who wasn't white would try to go up there, it was always cut off early. They weren't given the megaphone. It was just a lot of little problems like that. But there were some, not fights, but very loud verbal arguments that happened that night. And a lot of people were showing their true colors. Like, "Yeah, I'm one of those people who voted for Trump. And he won. So now I'm going to yell it out loud, because I'm proud" type of thing.

That next day was very gloomy. The whole campus, you just knew something was wrong. Everybody was talking about it. Some people were not talking at all. A lot of people were overwhelmed. That night I was comforting people—I had no idea who they were—because they were screaming and crying and like having panic attacks. And it's like, "Yo, my parents are undocumented. Yo, I'm undocumented." Stuff like that, and freaking out. And I'm just like, "I don't want to lie to you and say everything's going to be okay because I'm not that kind of person." So that was tragic, very tragic. But now a lot of actions have been happening, and protests and meetings and workshops, how to resist Trump or how to, blah, blah, blah. So, we're moving forward.

Vanderscoff: I can reflect on this from seeing this go down in New York. Where are you at with that now in terms of coping with that election, processing that, and then in terms of the work you're doing now, either educationally or community?

Brookins: If anything, I started analyzing the systems more. So, going back into history and seeing if Trump really is the ideal Republican, or is this man just like, did he time travel from the 1800s or something? I don't know. He used a lot of code words. It brought me back a lot to Reagan, and even Kennedy, that era, criminals and war on drugs. Like he was always saying "criminals" and "illegals" and "rapists" and stuff. So, it just brought it back to all that. So, I guess analyzing the systems more—not necessarily talking about Trump. But there were readings that were incorporated in classes that were specifically about Trump that got me thinking.

Vanderscoff: So unless there's anything else on that—

Brookins: No.

Final Reflections

Vanderscoff: So coming to just a few concluding questions, I know this is kind of tricky because you're in your second year here, so depending on how long you go through with your degree, maybe [you're] halfway, maybe something like that. But I'm curious about—and this is encompassing a lot of things we already talked about—but what your reflections are on like UCSC as a distinct or not [distinct] institution, what sets it apart. And that can be comments and that can be critiques.

Brookins: Stop lying about "We care about diversity." Because I feel like that's like a code word. I feel like what they include in diversity is just bringing a ton of international students who are usually of the same racial background. So, it's not really bringing diversity. It's just bringing folks for money. They're getting their money. So, I want more involvement in retaining students of color, black students, undocumented. Stuff like that would be great.

But I do strongly believe that Santa Cruz is very different, the city and this institution in particular. The black power movement was really big and nobody knows about it. Yeah, Huey

P. Newton went here. He was in prison. Nobody really knows that. The instructors came to prison based on memorization and gave him lectures and he still got his PhD. That was happening.

I cannot remember her name. The woman, I think her last name's Octavia or something, she mentored Rosa Parks. And so, one of the houses at Stevenson is called that, Casa Octavia**.** People think it's eight. But this is also the same house that they called R.PAATH.

And Oakes, it was supposed to be called Malcolm X College. Nobody knows that. Oh, really? What this university needs to do is reach into the history and start recognizing the people that were here, the people who go here. The instructors who were here during the sixties and who instructed who. Because like all we really know is Angela Davis and bell hooks—those are the two most popular. But nobody really knows the history. I think you'd really enjoy this presentation that that alumni gave at the plenary.[2] Because even I was like whoa, I didn't know that. But Oakes was supposed to be Malcolm X, but there was folks who found out about it and were like, "Hell no, He's violent," and stuff like that. So, there's like things like that. And a lot of the history of UC Santa Cruz is not recognized, which I think would change a lot of people's perspectives on it. And it made me stop saying like, "Man, this university is fucking terrible." Because it's really not. At the end of the day, I do feel like I have more support than people who don't go here. The campus is unique. And also, was built like this on purpose.

Vanderscoff: Tell me about that a little bit. The campus, or the structure of it, and how you experience that.

Brookins: Well, I'm aware that, what was that movement called? It started at Berkeley? The students were—

[2] See RPAATH as a Tool for Recovering and Preserving UCSC's Black Cultural Memory and Prominence from 1967-1980s by Moses J. Massenburg, UCSC, Class of 2010.
https://stevenson.ucsc.edu/documents/academic/core/MosesMassenburgPresentation.pdf

Vanderscoff: Oh, the Free Speech Movement.

Brookins: Yes, that. So, they have a central area, there's like a certain part where they can all go to where everybody in the city can see you type of thing. I mean, this university was made later. So that's why the colleges are completely split apart. That's why we're up in the mountains, in the boonies. That's why the Quarry is where it is, where you can only get to it from a few colleges that are nearby. If we rally up in the Quarry, nobody's going to see us. So that's why a lot of times they march down to the city and do that. So, it's irritating to know that that was totally on purpose. But I do appreciate the nature and the trees and the deer. It's like living in a Disney movie. Specifically *Snow* White—yeah, probably *Snow White.* That's the one.

But I think it has its pros and cons. You just have to do the history really. It's still an institution, so I'm against it. But I've been given a lot of opportunities. I think the more knowledge you have of the resources or what's available to you, you can succeed very well.

Vanderscoff: That's great. So, from your student perspective, has UCSC seemed to change in your time here? I mean, if UCSC's a changing institution, do you have a sense of what it's changing into? Is it changing towards the thing that you're talking about? We're talking about the year and a half you've been here. But I'm just curious, you're talking about the history, so comment a little more on that.

Brookins: There are certain people here who don't show they care. So, for example, there were past chancellors who were actually, there are pictures of him walking with like DHE participants, like actually in the flesh, hearing what they want, hearing what they need. This chancellor does not do that. Black students had demands. Some were very easy to meet. He said no to all of them, basically, pretty much. We make demands every year; always "no."

Vanderscoff: What sort of demands are you talking about?

Brookins: Like we want R.PAATH painted pan-African colors.[3] Because Berkeley, their university literally purchased property for them to have an Afro house. We asked for that. They said no. We also asked for R.PAATH to be painted. "Well, all the colleges were made in certain ways and to look identical. So, no." Are you fucking kidding? So, it's stupid things. We were asking for it in terms of the ABC community. And they're like, "Well, something, something, to all UCSC students, to all UCSC students, to all UCSC students," and always turning it back to, "Well, all UCSC students." I mean, it was like little things, to have R.PAATH be guaranteed housing for ABC-identified students. We still allow people who are not ABC but they are given a supplementary application where they recognize where they're going to live and stuff and the purpose of it. So, it's not like they're just blindly put in there. There's an extra application—just to be the RA, there's an extra interview.

So, it was like that. Just having the house painted, "No. All the colleges are made to look alike, and have a theme." So, it was demands like that that were said no to. I feel like the transparency's not here.

In hearing the history, I don't think it's changing in a very good way. In fact, they're going to add—that's another thing. We ask for more admittance of ABC students or students of color. And they said, "Well, you know, we are going to build 3,000 more beds, so maybe that will—" Basically, they kept turning it back to like 3,000 more, 3,000 more, 3,000 more beds. And that was irritating.

So, I just feel like the support's not really there. We have to really have protests and block dining halls to get anybody's attention. Even when we do, we get backlash, serious backlash. That first protest I went to—I don't know if you've heard of this app called Yik Yak. It's

[3] A few weeks after this interview UCSC African-American protestors submitted a list of demands to the UCSC administration and staged a protest/demonstration at Kerr Hall. See http://www.cityonahillpress.com/2017/03/06/submission-afrikan-black-student-alliance-demands/ and http://www.ksbw.com/article/students-uc-santa-cruz-building-takeover-enters-day-3/9606211

stupid—I don't know what it is. But you basically post random things anonymously. That day, it was bad. I mean, I haven't been called the N word, the E-R, that many times, like, "You are stupid," stuff like that, just people talking about it.

Vanderscoff: Students.

Brookins: Yeah, anonymously talking about it. So, it's not like we could figure out who's doing it. It's like all these things are happening and these are clear reasons. Like people said, "Oh, make a paper trail. Report that this poster was tore down. Report this, report that." It's not doing anything. The university's not doing anything, whether we ask nicely or stop people from entering Kerr Hall—things like that.

Vanderscoff: What sort of effectiveness have you found in the protest tactic? I mean, are people meeting with you afterwards? Or what's the impact of that in terms of the demands that you're trying to get across?

Brookins: Well, it's more like students on campus and off campus are more aware of a certain community's feelings. So, in this case, the black community, they're aware, "Oh, they're angry, and they actually have every right to be. I didn't know they were asking for demands." This time we put the demands on there so people were like, "Wow, yeah, yeah, yeah." And we got "no." So we get more support because people are more aware of it. And it gets people talking about, oh, why are they doing this? What's the reason? And are we getting more support? Are we getting more opposition? Hopefully more support. But faculty are aware of it and want to learn more. It's little, little changes by changes. But it's not changing fast enough for me. Like they were talking about, "in 2020"—I'm not even going to be here.

Vanderscoff: And what sort of change, if any, is there on say the collegiate level, or on your departmental level when it comes to this sort of activism?

Brookins: I know CRES is more—because that's literally what they're teaching, everything that they don't teach you in school and stuff. So, they're pretty supportive. If I were to come to, like the CRES leader or a CRES professor I have, they'd be extremely supportive. I'm not saying that the psych folks wouldn't. I'm not sure that anybody actually has. So, I think they do that through their research in showing support. Like, look we actually want to do research on this. I could probably write a proposal for a certain research project and find I'm allowed to do it. So, I don't know if there's much change in certain departments. But I do think that there are selective staff who are willing and able to help.

Vanderscoff: So we're just about done here. I was wondering if it would be all right if I read your introduction to me that you emailed me?

Brookins: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: So you say, "I am black and Mexican, bisexual sophomore from Sacramento, thus a very diverse living environment. Extremely involved in the black community here at UCSC." And so, coming towards a conclusion here, I'm wondering if you would mind reflecting on how UCSC has and has not been a home for the growth of that intersectional identity that you talk about there. And you can take that in any direction that you want to go.

Brookins: It has been with the resources and the organizations, whether it's like ABSO or MEChA, which I have yet to go to. I've been really hesitant on exploring that side of my identity. I would need to have more conversations with my mom and my grandma and stuff. But I've mentioned all the black orgs. There's recently a black sorority here, the Divine Nine. There's MEChA for the Latinx students. There's quite a few Latinx, predominantly Latinx sororities, and organizations that they have. I can be involved in their version of DHE but for Latinx students. So, I could do that. And there's a lot of faculty I could speak to. And even for, we have like the Cantu Center for LGBTQ+ students. We have BBQ [Beautiful Black Queers], and it's for black queer students. There's a ton of different support groups. I mean, we have

stuff for like French movies, French cinema, or something like that. There are random clubs like that. So, there's a lot of different places I can go to, to help foster a homey environment.

But honestly, I think it also fosters a home because there are people here who have conversations that they would not have back home, if that makes sense. Like, "Santa Cruz is so liberal." I'm not really sure how I feel about that. But it's like a lot of these conversations that you can just have, happen here, more so than back in Sacramento. It was difficult coming here and then going back home for the first time for break and hearing my family talk and have super homophobic comments, or transphobic, or Islamophobic, or anything—just all these things started coming up and I was like, whoa, whoa.

So, coming back here, I'll talk to a lot of people about how do I have those conversations with family members? How do I combat a situation where somebody's being outright racist? Like even going back home, I went to protests, I think like two or three over this past year and a half back home. Because I've been to some here. So, a lot of times I'll intertwine the two and try to stay active in both cities when I can.

The biggest thing that is missing [at UCSC] is diversity. That's the one thing I have a problem with.

Vanderscoff: And so as far as your hopes for your own impact, or what matters most for your time here, what is most important for you looking forward as a student here?

Brookins: Building the foundation necessary to help the students coming after me, their experience. I really love serving as a mentor, like, very much. Because then I'm like super real. (laughs) No pun intended. Super real—super honest and just real. And I love having the experience that I have, so I can show them like: "These are all the things you can do. These are the things you might experience. These are some things you will experience." Being able to try

and foster a home, that's inclusive of everyone, to help better students' experiences and try to make it easier for them. Also, to get my degree, duh.

Vanderscoff: So you mentioned graduate school in Atlanta or something?

Brookins: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: What about you, psych, or what is that? I mean, we're at an early stage.

Brookins: I honestly, I almost didn't come here because they don't have kinesiology. I really wanted to be a sports psychologist, and kinesiology is very relevant to that. But I don't necessarily have that to go to. So now that I've been taking the classes that I have, and experiencing what I have, and learning what I have, I also have been looking at being some sort of race and ethnicity educator. Or a psychological/race and ethnicity educator in prisons, maybe training workers there, teaching them, requiring them to take a certain history class. I feel like watching the documentaries that I have, reading the articles that I have and doing the research that I have, it's like, those prisons are not just going to disappear overnight. So, by the time I'm out, I think I'll be able to maintain a job in that field. I don't even know if that even exists. I feel like it's very similar to the police department. Anybody can join up after graduating high school. Go through training, and that's it. And it's proven in the Stanford prison project: you're given that position of power and you're going to abuse it. So, I think that's a big requirement.

And also for faculty in universities and in high schools. So, I'm not sure what I want to do. But one of those two.

Vanderscoff: Is there anything else you'd like to say before we close out? It can be anything—or maybe you've already said it.

Brookins: I feel like I've probably said most of what I want to. I don't know, I'm excited to hear myself and how I sound, as well as the other students, too. Because a friend of mine is actually going to do it, too, so I'm hoping he will expand on his experience. I can't really think of anything else. I feel like I just spewed out everything that I have in regards to this.

Vanderscoff: Well, that's great. Listen, on my end, I just want to thank you for your experience and your eloquence. It was really interesting and educational for me. Thank you so much for your time.

Brookins: No problem.

Samantha Caballero

At the time of this interview, Samantha Caballero was a senior majoring in environmental studies (agroecology), with a minor in earth sciences. She was affiliated with Kresge College, where she worked as a residential assistant. She grew up in Oxnard, California in a working- class Mexican American family.

Vanderscoff: Today is Monday, April 17, 2017. And this is Cameron Vanderscoff here for the Student Interviews Project at UC Santa Cruz. The way we've been starting this project out is by asking folks to introduce themselves, identify themselves in whatever words they choose, and then say just a little bit about your background.

Early Background

Caballero: Okay. My name is Samantha Caballero. I usually go by Sam, while I'm at UCSC. My pronouns are she, her, hers. I'm from Oxnard, California and this is my fourth year at UCSC. And other than that, I don't know what you specifically mean by background.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, I'm happy to walk you through some of that. So, our main topic here is your time at UCSC. But curious, to some extent, what it is you're bringing here with you. You said you're from Oxnard. So maybe if you could share a little bit about your family there and then lead us into talking about some of your educational background.

Caballero: Okay. I'm the middle child. I have an older sister and a younger brother. And I'm about two years apart from both of them, so I'm pretty solidly in the middle. I went to Channel Islands High School. And I have a lot of really mixed opinions about what my life was before I went to UCSC. I came from a predominantly lower socioeconomic background. A lot of people I knew were migrant workers. When my dad came to this country, one of his first jobs was picking lemons. And I feel like from that area, it's not something that a lot of people are proud of. A lot of the people are like, well, I hope that my kids can one day go off and not have to do backbreaking labor. Like it's a shame that we can't do all of these things.

Since coming to UCSC, I've really seen it in a different perspective because everybody deserves to be treated with dignity and respect and a lot of migrant workers in this country aren't really given that opportunity. Most people I knew didn't go to university, and most people I knew weren't what we call middle class. I know that 98 percent of my school were free and reduced lunch, so whatever socioeconomic bracket that is, that's where I come from. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: And so in that context, then, could you say a little bit more about what your family's values were around education for you?

Caballero: My parents both really valued education and they wanted us to do well. My mom, when we were little kids, would obsessively do homework with us. I remember being a kid and being so sad and being like, "Why do you keep calling me stupid? I'm not stupid!" I'm not a person who will just fight somebody when they insult me. I'd just kind of sit there and internalize it. I was like well, all right, she's calling me stupid. That means I'm probably stupid. And that means I'll never learn math. And then the rest of my life, I'll just be awful and poor and under a rock. I was always kind of a dramatic kid.

But my mom would always sit down and try to do homework with us. And then once we got to about the third grade, I remember her being like, "Okay, I can't help you out with your homework anymore because I don't know how to do this anymore." It came to the point where she didn't know how to do the math that we were learning and she didn't know the English that we were learning. So, from then on, she was just like, "Okay, well you're going to go home and do homework for an hour. I'm just going to watch that you do it."

Once I got to middle school and high school, things were a little different. My family life became a little more chaotic, so I don't think we really got the privilege of having a parent who was that invested in our education anymore. Not to say that my mom didn't care about us, but it just wasn't a thing that was as possible. So, I think that my family really wanted us to pursue higher education but didn't have access to the resources to ensure that we did it. I don't know

about—I feel like this has been really convoluted. But to summarize everything, I think they really valued education and wished that we could pursue it.

Vanderscoff: And so in that setting, then, I'm curious about how did you then find the resources to pursue the education? And maybe you could then walk us over to your decision to attend college and learning about UCSC.

Caballero: I really love the internet. (laughs) I think the internet is one of the greatest inventions of all time. I remember the first time I got to sit down and use a computer. I was in the fifth grade. I really liked reading, so then once I got to go on the computers at school, and I could go on them for fun, even though I wasn't supposed to, I found out that I could read book summaries online. That was so cool.

And then when we finally got a computer at our house, I could go on these things called forums. I'm sure you know what a forum is. Specifically, I would go on fan fiction dot net and Reddit and I would talk to people across the country. And a lot of these people were older than me. So, I was exposed to a lot of people who were going to go to school and I would just be like, "How are you going to get there?" And they'd be like, "Well, you apply." And like, "Duh, you're going to use Google." And I'd be like, "Oh, right. You are so right. (laughter) That is definitely the thing that you do."

And once I was in the age where you were supposed to apply to college, we had something that was really similar to AVID [Advancement Via Individual Determination][4], but we didn't have an actual AVID program fleshed out at our school. So, my teacher that I took for pre-calc was teaching a class that was like AVID. We called it Academic Enrichment. He was really helpful in showing us how to apply for college. And I do think that if I didn't take a class like that, I wouldn't have ended up applying to university. So, I think the value of classes like that,

[4] http://www.avid.org/

especially in backgrounds where kids don't generally usually attend a university, is really important.

Vanderscoff: So you start encountering some of these resources online. You start participating in some of the resources that are offered through your school. So, then I'm curious about how, in this mix, you made the resolution that yes, I will go to college, and then how you heard about Santa Cruz.

Caballero: My senior year of high school, I was really depressed. It was really hard to wake up in the morning. It was really hard to think about the future that I knew was going to happen. I already had it in my head that I was too stupid to go to university. I was taking this class, but I was really depressed and I didn't believe that I could go away to somewhere, or even go to university. I was like well, if I take this class, at least I'm going to know some of the things—if I have to go to community college. I'm at least going to take this class and it's going to be better than just going home.

So, part of the class was that you had to apply to at least four different schools. And because of my background, I had fee waivers, so that made it a lot easier to apply to places. Part of the grade in the class was that you had to write a personal statement. So, I think a lot of that helped out.

I wasn't even going to apply to the UCs. I have never told this story to someone; it just feels really weird because I'm in such a different place [now] than I was as a senior in high school. But at the time, I was on the wrestling team and I was at a tournament. And I was talking to the rest of my teammates. A lot of them were also seniors and they were talking about their personal statements, and how they were going to get out of this town and they were going to go to Berkeley, and it was going to be great. And then they're like, "What are you going to do, Sam?"

And I was like, "Well, I don't know. I didn't apply to any of the UCs. I think I might apply to the CSUs. The deadline is tonight. But I'm at this tournament and it's going to be fine and he's not going to be too mad if I don't do it. And like, it doesn't matter anyways, because I'm probably not going to get in."

And then all of my teammates were like, "No, you should go home. And you should do it. Even if you get rejected everywhere, it's better to apply and then find out that you didn't get in, than the other way around." And they're like, "Why don't you think you're going to get in?"

And I was like, "Well, I don't have a 4.0."

They're like, "Neither do we."

And I'm like, "Yeah, but I don't know." I just really didn't have a really good sense of self-esteem or self-confidence. And also, at the time, a lot of things were happening. My dad was really sick, so I really wanted to stay home and be near him. I was like, why would I go away from that?

I think ultimately, once I got home, I was like, well, I already have those personal statements written. I should do it. They're right. So, I went on Google. I hadn't really done any research. And I was like okay, well, important things—I really like reading. So, something that would have a good liberal arts background. And I also really like science, so something that would preferably have programs that are good in both.

And as I was looking at the UCs, I was like, okay, well, it doesn't look like these are too distinguishable per campus. All right. What about the mascots? Which of these mascots are the least problematic? (laughter) I was like okay, well, if I'm not going to get in anywhere, it doesn't really matter anyway. So, I was like okay, well, the banana slug, that seems really cool. Gauchos, does that have any ties to Native Americans? Looked it up. Not really. Okay, that's

cool. The Aggies? That's cool. (laughs) And then, I think I chose UC Merced. I was like okay, a bobcat. Those ended up being the schools that I chose.

And then when it became springtime, by that time in my life, I was a lot less depressed than I was in the fall but I was still kind of emerging out of that. When I got all the acceptance letters, I was really shocked. I was like oh my God, okay, well, I should reevaluate things. (laughs)

Yeah, so I don't know. It's really fun for me to talk about getting accepted to university because of how different the contrast was from the time that I applied to the time that I got in. I don't say it to brag at all. I legitimately did not think I was going to get in anywhere. So then when I found out that I got into every place that I applied, it was this really big and huge surprise.

Vanderscoff: So you get all of a sudden all of this affirmation that yes, you can go to these places. So how does that change your perspective in terms of what you were capable of as a student? And then how did you select this particular institution?

Caballero: I think it changed a lot about how I thought about myself as a student. It affirmed that I was smart, even though I felt like I wasn't particularly. I think a lot of it was that I tend to internalize criticism. And there are a lot of people in my life, especially back at home, who are really critical. And even though none of them specifically said, "You can't do this," it just felt like okay, all these people don't think that I'm really bright, so I can't be really bright, so I can't do it. But to have these acceptances roll in, it changed my horizon. It changed my viewpoint. I was like, all right, in this tiny town, there are people who don't think that I'm really bright. But in all of these different campuses, there *are* people who think that I am bright. And even I don't think that you have to go to a university in order to be bright, or to have intellectual thought, it was really affirming to know that I could do it in the formal, societally accepted way.

That Easter, I went and toured the different universities. It was really nice. I ultimately chose UCSC because I thought that if I went to UCSB, that would be really close to home. And I was

like well, even though I want to be home, I feel like if I go there and it's only thirty minutes away, I'm never going to leave. I'm never going to stop being connected to this place. And I was really starting to be aware about how I wasn't thriving in the city that I lived in. It just wasn't really a good environment for me to be in. So, I thought about the times and places that I was always the happiest. And I thought, whenever I visited my cousins in Northern California, I was always really happy. And the first time I went to San Francisco, I found out that other people are vegetarian. And I really didn't think so. I really thought that most people were not. (laughs) So it was just things like that. I had such a small-town mentality because of the place that it grew up, that when I went to other places, I was like, wow, there are other people like this! This is so great!

Coming to UC Santa Cruz

I really liked how friendly everybody at UCSC was when I came here. And if I'm going to be completely transparent, I also really liked how much financial aid I got. When the springtime came and I was like okay, besides fit, I have to think about how am I going to pay for this?

And UCSC also does a program called the Bridge Program, which is through the EOP Office. They invite incoming frosh to come about a month before school starts and they put them in college prep programs. UCSC had offered me that. So, I thought okay, well, I like the campus. The people there were friendly. They seemed to have services that want to support kids like me. Not to say that the other universities that I applied to wouldn't have, but it just seemed that UCSC was the most welcoming.

Vanderscoff: So you accept UCSC, and then if we move into your time of coming here—so your first real exposure, then, is coming to the Bridge Program here through EOP. So, can you describe that initial experience of really coming and spending time at UCSC and thinking about it? Because you said you wanted to go someplace that was different from home. So, I'm curious

if you could then talk about arriving here and finding out about how it was, or wasn't different from home.

Caballero: I'm trying to figure out how much I want to embarrass myself. (laughter) I usually have a pretty high tolerance for it. You know, okay, (laughs) I'm going to backtrack a little bit. I think my parents should be fine with me talking about this because we've already talked about this a bunch. So, when my acceptance letters came in, the majority of them were for schools in Northern California. And I was expecting my parents to be really happy and be like, "Oh my God! You got in! How exciting."

But their reaction was to rip them up. They were really upset with me. They were like, "How dare you try to go so far away? How can you be so selfish? You're going to go up there and you're going to forget about us. You're going to forget about where you came from. You're going to rack up all of this debt. It's going to be so expensive up there. All the people up there—none of them are going to be Mexican. You're going to be with all these Americans." There was a lot of loaded language there.

I just remember months of arguing with them and being like, "No, that's not true. Even if I'm far away, that doesn't mean that I'm not going to still care about you guys. Even if I'm far away, that doesn't mean that I'm going to forget everything that I learned here." They were basically saying, you are not allowed to go away for college. So, when I accepted UCSC's offer, I didn't clear that with them. They had told me no, and then I put a yes. (laughs)

So, when I came here, there was a lot of pressure to be successful because I went through all of this arguing. And then finally I was like, "I need to start buying things for my dorm." And they were like, "What are you talking about?" I was like, "Well, I'm going to go to UCSC. You can be excited about it or you can be mad. 'But this is what I'm going to do."

So, when I went away for the Bridge Program, there was a lot of tension between me and my family because they were like, "No, you can't do this." And I was like, "Well, I'm going to do it." So, there I was. (laughs) So going to the Bridge Program, it was really interesting because I had all of these emotions around it. And I had just broken up with my high school boyfriend, too. So, I was like, all right, this place has to be the best, because I've already done so much to get to this point. If this is terrible, I don't want to move back home.

So, I think my first impressions of UCSC were me just trying a little too hard to love everything. I bought a bunch of apparel from the bookstore. I was trying to find my best friends forever and I was like, "We're all going to go to the dining hall together!" During the program, I just remember trying to group everybody together. And I was like, "Let's do all of these cool group activities together so that we're all friends." And then people were just like, "Umm…. like, what are you doing?" (laughter) Like coming off a little too strong than maybe I should have.

I had a really good experience with the program. I am, to this day, still friends with a lot of the people who did it. So, I think it was a really good way of networking and making ties with people who have similar backgrounds to you.

Then going off into my freshman year of college, once all of the freshmen came in, it was really nice because I already knew roughly where everything was. So, a lot of my roommates that came in were like, "Where's the bookstore from here? Where's everything?" And I was like, "Oh, you're just going to take this bus, and you're going to go there." Or, "You're just going to walk there. I can show you the path."

So, my initial experience with UCSC was going to the Bridge Program. And then I lived in Kresge, which is all apartments, which is really unusual for freshmen. And then I took a lot of the generic classes that people take as freshmen. Going into STEM—I took math, soc, and then core.

Some Challenges

My first year was a lot of different experiences. I think the marked thing that I noticed was different was that I'd never really been around white people, ever, so that was a really big change. (laughs) The area that I grew up in was predominantly Mexican and then there were some Filipinos, some Vietnamese people, some black people. But the majority of the people I grew up around were Mexican. The majority of us were first-generation Americans. The majority were ESL learners.

When I was a kid, I remember it was weird that I didn't know Spanish. And then when I went to UCSC, it was suddenly really weird because people were like, oh my God, my roommate's like a Spanish girl. And I was like oh, okay. I'd never heard of anybody saying that. And it was like, "I'm not from Spain. What do you mean by that?" (laughs)

Yeah, so I'd never really been around people—it was just really odd to me that suddenly I finally felt for the first time in my life that I was a true minority where I was living. It was also really odd to me that people had so many different experiences and ways that they took things. I had never really met people who would just yell at their parents. And that was a thing that I saw when I went away to college. People being like, "Oh my God, Mom! You didn't give me the thing that I wanted to get! Why are you doing that?" And then there were people who smoked weed with their parents. And then there were people who—(laughs) So I think it was just a marked contrast between me—I was always relatively formal and conservative with my parents. So, there was a lot of cultural differences.

I think it was also really odd because—I guess this is going to be on the record. I mean, they're going to be okay with it. They have to be. So, when I lived in my first apartment, because I ended up moving out halfway through, I was in this mindset of, this has to work. This is going to work. We're going to be friends. It doesn't matter. And I just was not getting along with my original roommates. I remember it was day two and we were all talking and trying to get to

know each other. And one of my housemates was like, "Yeah, they sent me to live with a—" and I'm going to apologize for using this word – "They sent me to live with a tranny and I didn't want to live with *it*. So, I yelled at the housing office until I could live in this place. And now I live with you guys. And it's so great because that would have been too much, you know?"

And I remember just sitting there—how am I supposed to address this? I thought this place was going to be really liberal and I wouldn't have to worry. It was going to be the first time in my life that I was going to be around people who were really open and accepting. And I'm not saying that this place isn't open and accepting. But it was so odd to encounter somebody like that day two of college.

And then my other housemate had this habit of using the word "retarded" all the time. That also made me really uncomfortable. So, it was just a lot of language things that were really apparent. But I was like all right, it's fine. I'm going to make it work anyway. I'm going to talk to them about it and it's going to be good. And then I would try to talk to them about it in person and then that didn't work. And I did the thing where I just Facebook messaged them because they weren't listening to me in person. And that didn't really work, either. So, I was like okay, well, everything's fine, this is fine. I can live with this. I tried. We're still really cool; everything is still fine.

And then, as the year went on, I just felt like we weren't communicating really well with each other. A lot of my housemates always had their boyfriends over and I just didn't know what to say. I was like, "How am I supposed to explain to you in any clear terms that I just don't want you to have sex in my living room. (laughs) I don't know. I don't know how to explain to you that I just don't want your boyfriend to be in my room every night when I share a triple. I just don't know how to explain that. I just want to live with the two people that I was assigned to live with. I didn't sign up to live with four people. I signed up to live with two."

I spent a lot of that quarter just trying to be nice and mediate everything. I was like, you know, it's okay, I'm not miserable here. I love living here. All of my housemates are great. (laughs) And it just—I think it took a lot for me. I became really close to the RA in my building, who's still one of my best friends. And other people.

And I don't know, I think through that experience of becoming close friends with my RA, and joining a group called KMEC, which is the Kresge Multicultural Education Committee, it hit me that I'm not really happy living here. The excuse that I'm just uncomfortable because I grew up really Catholic and I don't have a boyfriend, is not the valid excuse. Because that doesn't matter. If I'm telling somebody that I don't want something to happen, they should just respect that and not do it instead of trying to tell me that something's wrong with me. Or that like, "Well it's because you grew up Catholic. And once you stop being super Catholic, this is going to be fine."

I ended up moving out of that apartment. And then I moved into a different one and stopped being friends with all the people that lived in that old one, except for two people. It was really great. My life got a lot better.

Kresge College

Vanderscoff: And so one question which sort of predates all that: How had you wound up in Kresge in the first place? What sort of expectations did you have for this place, coming into it?

Caballero: Almost no expectations, I would say. I had a friend from Oxnard, who also went to UCSC and her name is Aliyah. So Aliyah was really gung-ho about everything; she was just really organized. She's great. She's really organized about universities. She did not apply to all of them at like 11:50 at night. Once we got our acceptance letters, she was like, "Well, which college are you going to go to?" And I was like, "UCSC." She was like, "No, the different colleges." And I was like, "Oh. I don't know. Which ones are you going to do?" And she's like,

"Well, the deadline is like—" I think it was, I don't remember if it was the same day, or if it was the day after. But when you apply for housing, you're supposed to choose your preferences. So, she was like, "Yeah, of the places that we visited and looking at their themes, I'm going to choose these three colleges. And Cowell is number one." I was like, "Okay, I'll just do the same thing then." (laughs)

So, I remember going in, I was like, all right, I really want to be in Cowell. And if I can't be in Cowell, maybe College Eight. And then, Porter was really nice, so Porter. And then, I don't know about the other two. I think one of them is Kres-edge and the other one is College Eight, which is now Rachel Carson.

And so, when I got picked to be in Kresge, I was like, that's so weird. That wasn't one of my three choices. Because generally you get into the top three, so I was like, okay, I should just appeal and live in Cowell. Because I don't know anybody who's going to be here. And then I took the time to look it up and I found out that they were apartments. And I was like, oh, no. Everybody keeps telling me I need to have the dorm experience. I should follow that. I should just have the dorm experience. But I also looked at the housing rates and to live in an apartment on campus on the 55-day is the cheapest plan you can do as a freshman. I should know that because I've worked in housing for three years now. I'll go on the record and say, that's the cheapest option you can do as a freshman. And I was like, oh, the cheapest. I'm so down for that, Okay.

So I stayed in it. And I knew that I was going to be in an apartment. I think, once I looked it up on Wikipedia, I was like, okay, this place is going to be really hippie dippy. There's going to be lots of hippies. There's probably going to be a lot of patchouli and white people. And I was ready. I was like, okay, everybody's going to be out there and artistic. And all I'm going to do is like, I don't know, paint. And there's going to be naked people everywhere.

So, I think that was my general impression of what Kresge was going to be. Which is a lot different than my lived experience in the first quarter that I was there.

Vanderscoff: So you've talked about this in terms of your own housing arrangement. Maybe you can say a little bit more about those expectations and then the reality that you found at Kresge. That could be outside of your living quarters, or inside, if there's anything topical there. Or maybe even through spaces like the core course, or something like that. Just however you saw that difference between reality and expectations, if you could just talk a little bit more about that.

Caballero: I think I also expected Kresge to be a lot about activism. And when I first came there, it just was really odd, because I was expecting it to be rallies all the time and there would be groups that would continuously talk about it. And there weren't really. Kresge had a lot of people who like to party, which I knew would be the case. But I was a little disappointed because I wanted to go to a party and talk about Marx. I know that sounds really pretentious now, I kind of cringe as I say it. But that was, honest to God, what I was expecting—I'll go to a party; we'll all talk about Marxism and dismantling capitalism. But I went to the party and they would talk about what weed they wanted to smoke, or something like that. It was very generic college. Or what they saw on TV last week. Which, you know, is fair—I don't want it to appear that I'm so upset that this place doesn't have those kinds of conversations. Because as I've gone further in my career in Kresge—and I've been really involved in the community—there are places where you can talk about that. Just not necessarily the first few months of freshman in college.

And then in my core course, I think I was really surprised, because we talked a lot about whiteness. And we talked a lot about how in academic spaces the discourses center on Western standards. So, a lot of what we read and write is in English and it's supposed to be formal English, and a lot of them are from old white men. I'd never seen education framed in that way.

I think, growing up, I was like well yeah, that's where all the smart people are. But I'd never explicitly thought that. It wasn't like I was like, yeah, I love white men. They're so smart! It wasn't like that. But it was like, okay, well if I'm in school, the way to be educated is to follow Western philosophy and thought. It had never occurred to me before my core course and then classes I've taken since at UCSC, that there's a lot of other thought besides Western thought. And things like Ebonics is also important, things that aren't about formal, perfect English are also ways to communicate and are also really valuable.

Yeah, so I think my experience of Kresge, from what I thought it was to what it actually was, was really different in good and bad ways. Another way that I think it was good was there are people in Kresge that are really alternative and what you would call hippies. But generally, most people are pretty open-minded, I would say. I mean, you do have to have occasional conversations when people walk around with dreads and are white, or just not black, and talk about cultural appropriation. So, I'm not saying that it's a paradise of thought. But I am saying that I think generally people who choose Kresge tend to be more open minded. And I think that that has also changed as housing has changed. UC Santa Cruz has been in a housing crisis for at least the last three years and we've converted a lot of singles into doubles, and doubles into triples. And in Porter and the other dorms, the lounges have been converted into quads. We don't have any lounges available. But specifically, for Kresge—I think that means there are a lot of people who wanted to be in another [college] that ended up being housed in Kresge. So sometimes there's not as much of a unified spirit because UCSC doesn't have a really big sports culture. I feel like a lot of our identity is based on what community we lived in our first year, or what we're affiliated with.

Vanderscoff: And you find that to be the case all the way through, even as people move out of their dorm and so forth?

Caballero: Yeah. I think it's a lot different for transfer students. Transfer students generally don't feel that sense of belonging to what college they're in. But for people who come in as first-years, or people who live in the transfer building in Porter, the place that you live in becomes a lot of your identity. A lot of people have a sense of pride. People from Merrill are like, "Yeah, I'm a part of Merrill and we have MAC [Merrill Activities Council]. We have all of these things that make us Merrill. And I'm a Merrillite and that is my identity."

And Stevenson. "I'm a Stevensonian. And we have the Path to a Greener Stevenson. House 3 is where I threw up and that is my place. And I have all of these memories about doing all these things there."

And I guess in Kresge, "Kresge is my place and I'm a Kresgean. And this is where we do Pride. And this is where I constructed a really big dreamcatcher and hung it off of Building 3." People seem to build community and bonds based on what college community they're in. I think that it's apparent, at least apparent to me, as somebody who's worked and lived in housing for so long, that this is a campus-wide thing and not just something centered in Kresge.

Academic Experience

Vanderscoff: So I hope we can kind of keep tabs on that theme of college identity and all that. But something I wanted to be sure that we addressed as we're talking about you sort of adapting to UCSC, is your academic journey towards your major. If you could say a little bit about how that came to happen, and any key classes or instructors in that?

Caballero: Okay. I'm an environmental studies major, an earth science minor. I've really liked my academic journey here. I've pretty much—when you go to UCSC, by the time that you're a second-year, you have to declare and you have to have an academic plan and plan it all out. I pretty much have kept everything for ENVS. Whenever I go to see my advisor, he's always like, "You know, people usually don't take all the classes in the order that they do." I was like,

"Yeah, but that's just who I am as a person." I'm pretty good at following whatever direction I tell myself I have to follow.

My concentration in ENVS is agroecology, so I've taken all of the agroecology classes you can, except for one. I think my instructors have been pretty good. Carol Shennan is a really great professor and I worked in her lab for a little bit. I think she is really great at what she does and I'm excited to see what innovations in sustainable agriculture she'll help bring to life. Stacy Philpott is an amazing professor.

A lot of my experience at UCSC has been just like the student organizing that I've done. I think academics are also important, but I guess when I think about my time at UCSC, a lot of it has been like, what's all this work I can do for the communities that I live in? What are the events that I can put on? What are all the things I can do? And then, oh, yeah, I also should keep working on that five-page paper. (laughs) Which I think is just me as a student.

I've also really enjoyed classes that I've taken outside of my major. I think with earth sciences—some of my favorite classes have been the paleontology classes I've taken. Hilde Schwartz is an amazing professor and everybody should take her dinosaurs class. I didn't take it, but I took the upper division of it. She was amazing. Because she teaches a class called *The History of Dinosaurs*. And she's a great professor.

Matthew Clapham is also a great professor. Gary Griggs. I think the whole Earth Science Department is pretty amazing. I've taken a lot of field trips through it, so if you like field trips, it's a good major or minor to join.

Last quarter I took a senior seminar in fem studies. I've never taken a fem studies class before, so it was really interesting. (laughs) I took it with Marcia Ochoa and I think she was also a really good professor.

I have to say, I don't think I've taken a professor here that I was like, this person is awful or terrible. I don't think I have a lot of critical opinions about the classes that I've taken. I feel like a lot of the professors here, even though some of them might not necessarily be good teachers, I feel like a lot of the people here take what they're studying and their life's work pretty seriously. Even if I didn't do well in their course, or I didn't feel like they were a good professor, I can still respect what they're doing. I also think it's a symptom of being a professor versus being a researcher. Being a professor has a lot more pay and you get more access to having a lab, or you get more access to archives. You have a lot more options open to explore the topic that you want to. But it also means that you have to teach. So, I feel like there are a lot of people who would, I guess in an ideal world, be what a researcher is who isn't a professor. But because they want to have access and graduate students to work with, they have to become professors and they have to teach in front of 300 students even if they don't have any background in teaching, or they might not necessarily want to teach.

I can't fault the individual for a systemic problem. Which is to say that even in courses where I feel like the professor could have been a lot clearer, the professor could have done a lot more, I don't feel comfortable faulting any professor for doing that because I think it's a symptom of how the UC system is built.

Vanderscoff: Being a research university, right. So, one question I do have is, so you have this articulated passion. But where does it come from in the first place? Would you mind saying a little bit more about how you came to study environmental studies in particular, and this earth sciences minor?

Caballero: When I was a little kid, I really liked science. I would always watch the National Geographic channel and I'd read books about it. Once I went away to university, I originally was like well, I'm not smart enough to be a science major. I'm just not smart enough to do it. I should do English because that's where I get good grades. I also really enjoy English and

creative writing. I'm not smacking on it. I don't want to imply at all that it is easier. I don't even believe that majors can be easier. Because in majors that people talk down upon, "I'm like well, do you want to read 400 pages a week? Do you think that you're capable of reading 400 pages a week for one class, on top of the five-page essay that you have to do for another class?" I feel like that's the reality of being an English major. Or, if you're a philosophy major, it's like how can you take somebody's thought and then transcribe that into your own argument, but not plagiarize that? Each discipline has just so much that you can do. I think every major has complexity to it. So, when I'm saying this story, I don't want it all to imply that I think any of the majors in the humanities that I thought about doing were easier.

But when I went to UCSC, when I went to talk to advising, they were like, "What are your interests?" I was like, "Well, I feel pretty open-ended but I think it would be cool to maybe do science. But I feel like I maybe can't do it, but maybe I should do this major." And they were like, "Oh, you can do whatever you want."

I ended up talking a little bit to my middle school teacher. His name's Mr. Martino. He was my middle school English teacher. I think I had him for seventh grade. And I was like, "Yeah, I'm going away to college now and I'm thinking about my major."

And he's like, "Well, if you're between two majors, you should start off with the one with more requirements. Because if you end up switching to another one, it's a lot easier to catch up on those requirements if they're less than the one that are more." So, for example, for ENVS, there's six or so introductory classes to start with, and there's like eight upper divs that you have to take. So, there are a lot of really specific requirements you have to do in an order. As opposed to English or cognitive science or psych, which are majors that I was also considering, that didn't have such a strict, you have to take these classes in this order.

So, I decided to go with ENVS and I really liked it. I really liked the idea of being a scientist. And even though, right now at this moment, as a senior, I don't think I'm going to want to go

into science research, or do something in a laboratory, I still really value all of the ideas and thoughts that I got from having a science education. I think knowing how to read a graph and having a statistical background is really helpful. If I read an article online, I can look at the graph and then know if the graph is relevant to whatever I'm reading. I'm not saying that you couldn't know that in another discipline, but because that's something that is so heavily forced upon—even though right now, the graphs I'm reading are about ocean acidification, I can still apply knowing how to read that, and knowing if it's relevant to the article, to an article about child poverty. So, I really like that science allows you—because I don't think there's a lot of—you can't be very broad with science. You can't be like, well, I *think* that the answer is five, and I'm going to give you an argument about why it's five. Or, it would be beautiful if the answer was five. You kind of have to do the math, and do the steps about like this is why it's five. And if you don't do those steps, you lose. (laughter) And then it's over. But it's been really helpful informing who I am because my personality is — I'm pretty open and I'm pretty flexible as a person, personality-wise. So even though I think I could have learned some of the skills that I learned in science, I think that learning just sometimes you have to make a hard decision between one or the other. If you're in a lab, you have to be like okay, well this is the regimented schedule that I have to keep and if I don't put in the soil sample at the right time, or if I don't process it, then it's over and I have to redo the entire process. I think that whole experience is really humbling. It's one of my main reasons why I think the sciences are really important for everybody to study, even if the person doesn't enjoy them.

Vanderscoff: So just to get a little more specific about some of the things that you've been doing within your departments, you've been a Life Lab intern. And I'm wondering if, as a way of getting more concrete about some of these things that you're talking about, you could talk about that particular involvement.

Caballero: Yeah, I was a Life Lab intern spring of my freshman year. It was pretty fun. I led field trip tours for kids on the farm. I'm trying to remember a lot of what I did, but it was three years ago, so my memory doesn't feel as concrete with that.

Also, my freshman year, I helped out one of my friends, her name is Lydia, with her senior project, which was setting up a garden in the city of Watsonville in an elementary school. That experience was really great because it led me to think that I could probably be a teacher one day if I chose to because I really enjoyed working with kids and setting up lesson plans and teaching science education.

And I think with both of those experiences, they were both being with smaller children and explaining science to them. Doing things like that is really fun because it's having the words to explain the experiences that people already experience. So, it's like, "All right, look at that blade of grass. How does the grass eat? What do you guys think? Does it have a mouth? No. How is it surviving?" And then you can explain what photosynthesis is, like the sun comes down. And then kids are like, "Okay, how do we eat?" And I'm like, "Yeah, how do you eat? Does the sun come down and then does it feed you?" And they're like, "Does it?" And I'm like, "Let's see what you have to say." (laughs) I really enjoy doing activities like that because it teaches people how to think about the world in a different way.

I was also a lab assistant in the Shennan Lab for two and a half years and that was really fun. I think that whole experience really showed me just how valuable the work that we do at an undergrad level is. And through the lab interns aren't the ones writing the grant proposals, and we're not the ones coming up with the big ideas for the experiments, we're the ones setting them up and testing them out. I think it's just one of the ways that UCSC can offer practical job experience to kids that still go to school because we're pretty much doing work as lab technicians.

I don't know if that helped to answer things. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: It does. So, one thing we've been asking people—and this is something that might be less apparent to you or to me—as people who are going through education more recently, but something that's changing, historically speaking in education, is the role of online coursework. So, I'm wondering if you could reflect on that mode of learning as far as your major goes, in particular, or any other class you've taken here at UCSC, and what sort of a role that's played in your education.

Caballero: I'm a strong proponent of having, maybe not the traditional classroom, but at least face to face. Like having an instructor go and teach you, and then writing it down. I've read a lot of studies, and I feel like I've experienced this, too—if I have to write things down, even though I don't really like it, I would prefer to just type it or just look at a lecture slide—it does make you retain the information a lot better. I think the role of online education can be really good, because we have things like Canvas or eCommons, and these are places where professors can upload lecture slides and examples. And you can look them up and find out how to do the equation, or how to do whatever problem you have to do, and how to do your homework. So, having an online component of the class is really good, but I don't really think that having a purely online setting is good. I think that there's a lot of temptation to just Google things, or to be less engaged because you don't have to sit down and have a meeting, or physically be somewhere. But I also feel like I didn't have an online college experience. I didn't take classes online at a place like Phoenix, or San Jose State, or any other university that can offer distance. So, I think it depends. Maybe the role would be really good for people who have to work or are taking care of young infants. Or just people who are really busy but want to further their careers. So, I don't want to discount the mode of learning. I just don't think that it is necessarily as good as going in person and doing it. But I think in the society that we live in, it's becoming a lot harder to dedicate a chunk of your life to going away to university, or just going to classes. So, I think it's good that we have an alternative option for people who can't go attend a school.

Residential Assistant

Vanderscoff: Thank you. So, I wanted to be sure to save some time for us to talk about some of your college and advocacy involvement, as well as on the campus-wide level. One place perhaps for us to start is so you mentioned that you've been working in housing for some time now. So, I'm wondering if you could share how you started out in that position, and then walk through some of your responsibilities in that.

Caballero: So I started being an RA my second year. I guess it technically started spring of my first year, because you have to go through a thing called spring training on Monday nights—spring training is an hour—so you spend an hour trying to get the ropes of the job down. And you do a lot of pre-work; you do a lot of ice breakers. And then the summer before the following year, you do a whole three-week long training about how to do the job. So, I guess that's where I got my start.

After my freshman year of living in that apartment, I just kind of thought, well, if I'm an RA, I can talk to people who've been through similar experiences and they're going to know from somebody who had an apartment where they felt really uncomfortable and then was able to move—they'd have an RA who would know that. And then I could help other people move out. I also really like throwing on events and I thought that that would be a really good way to do both. It's been a really good experience. It's been really challenging at times.

A lot about being an RA is knowing that whatever schedule you have can change in a minute, depending on what's happening in your building. You set aside all this time to do homework with the knowledge that somebody could walk in and tell you what crisis they're going through, and then knowing okay, well, I can't do the homework now. I have to make sure that this person is okay, because I'm the resource available.

So, I think a lot about being an RA is just having them know that you are a resource available, and then just taking that really seriously, especially when you have freshmen. I think a lot of people have this notion that RAs don't really do anything. And sure, I'm sure you know somebody who didn't do anything, or didn't take the job seriously, but I don't think the majority of RAs have that experience. Or even that luxury to do that. I mean, being an RA, a lot of it is knowing that you're a confidential resource, and then talking to your residents and checking up on each room or each apartment, depending on if you live in the residence halls or the dorms. Putting on events and seeing people coming and be engaged, and having events be topics that are really timely and good for the community. It is a lot of personal involvement. It's a lot of going home at the end of the day but still being at work.

We do a thing called duty, which is you have a phone and people can call the duty phone if they're locked out, or if they're having a mental health crisis, or if they're having roommate issues, or somebody's being loud. So, a lot of the job is knowing that you're going to be tied down to the place that you are, the place that you live. It is a lot of dedication to enriching other people's lives.

Vanderscoff: When I was here, I was an RA. And there's sort of, in some sense, there's three parts of the job. Part of it is there's the policy aspect, where you're expected to enforce policy. Then there's the programmatic aspect, right? More attention to the social aspect of people's time. And then there's more of a health aspect, which has to do with questions of safety and questions of mental health. So, I'm curious, then, for you, what sort of balance or prioritizing have you done in terms to your approach to the job, since there are these very different sort of expectations of it.

Caballero: Yeah. That's a pretty good and succinct way to describe it, I think, so kudos to you. I think the way that I approach all three of those things, and the way that I describe it to my residents, too, and the people that I meet, is my job is to make sure that everybody feels safe, so

whatever I'm doing is in the interest of making sure that people in this community feel safe. Because some people will be upset if you have to document them for X, Y, and Z. So, I think it's knowing that people will be upset, but being very sure to frame it in a way that is really intentional and really caring. I think I really go about this job with a really big sense of caring about the people that I interact with. I don't really see myself as a police officer. I don't really see myself as a hall monitor. That's not really what I'm doing. I just feel like a lot of my job is just making sure that everybody feels safe and included. And I'm not going to say comfortable because I think a lot about being in college is sometimes you have to step out of your comfort zone. And what I mean by that is not you have to feel comfortable with your roommate having sex in front of you. That's not what I mean. No. (laughs) I think what I mean by that is sometimes you have to feel uncomfortable if you say something problematic. Like if you refer to somebody as "it" you're not going to feel comfortable when you have to have a dialogue about why that's not okay.

Dialog Across Differences

Or, other topics that somebody might not feel comfortable about is maybe the presidential election. Sometimes you're not going to feel comfortable if you come from a Republican background and you're like, "Well, this person shouldn't be targeted for being a Republican. You all should not do that." There are opinions and things that a lot of people won't feel comfortable about 100 percent of the time. I think it's all about trying to meet people in the middle.

I think something that I've especially tried to work on is to avoid using call-out culture. What I mean by that is that, especially when I started here, if somebody would say something that was problematic, or something wasn't considerate, people would just call them out and call them a bad person, blah, blah, blah. What I've been trying to learn is even if I don't share the same opinions as somebody else, I think that I should still respect their right to having opinions and

other people should respect their rights. I think there is a line to that. The line is that once it starts infringing upon other people's rights, then I can't be okay with it. What is an example of that? I think it's okay if a girl were to say, "I don't believe in abortion so I'm not going to get one." I think that's fair. If she doesn't want one, she should never be forced to have one. But I don't think it's okay for her to say, "I don't believe in abortion so nobody should have one." So, I think it just is being really intentional about those fine lines, just having dialogues with people about it. Because something I've noticed about UCSC is that a lot of the conversations we have with each other can be really polarizing and people will be really disparaging to people who don't hold the same opinions. And it can be kind of a bullying mentality. Even if I agree with the people who are being really aggressive about their point, I think that there should be certain levels about treating people, or hearing other opinions and being more open.

I think that can also go into this conversation about tone policing, which I think is really apparent in organizing spaces. If somebody's angry, you shouldn't say that they don't have the right to yell at people. I think that that opinion is also valid. I'm not going to say that people don't have the right to be angry, and don't have the right to yell. But I do think that people have the right to speak as well. Everybody has the right to speak and the right to act. So, there's a freedom of speech, but there's not a freedom of consequence. I think people should think in those lines more. I've spent a lot of my time here trying to get that point across to people. And I've made a lot of programs, and the events that I've held, or the spaces that I've occupied, I've tried to make that point of like all right, well, yes. People should not be shut down. People should be allowed to speak. And we should be able to hear people out. That doesn't mean what they say doesn't hold a set of consequences, or it doesn't mean that they get to say hate rhetoric. I'm not saying that hate crime is acceptable. But I am saying that there are stages that people are in and you can't be immediately upset that people don't know things like pronouns, if they've never heard of them before. So, a lot of my time at UCSC has been just trying to meet people in the middle, and trying to understand where people are coming from.

Vanderscoff: So, one follow-up question I have about that is what those key areas of difference have been, or what they seem to gather around, as far as the conversations that you've had with people over your time here. One thing I'd like to ask about, specifically, actually is that question of pronouns—where that educational opportunity first happened for you, and this consciousness of being aware of the pronouns that you use and then that other people use. That's something that's been in a lot of these interviews; there's been a lot of people who have had some sort of consciousness about that and foregrounding that. So, I'm curious, then, if you could just share your own story of developing that consciousness.

Caballero: I think I heard about it before I went away to university on a social media called Tumblr. I think Tumblr's pretty popular now—I don't know. Okay, but I heard about it on Tumblr. It was not something that people in Oxnard used, or just in the immediate areas I lived in. so I don't think I ever started to use it until I went to UCSC. And then during the first building meeting that my RA had, she had everybody explain their pronouns.

Since working in housing, I think it's something that is really important to me. I've had conversations with friends who have moved away. I remember one of my friends was like, "Well, I live in New Jersey now and I never use pronouns. I never say things like "male-identified," that's just a UCSC thing." And I think, I just feel strongly since I've been here and I've been exposed to that, this is something I'm going to bring to workplaces that I work at, wherever I end up working, or whatever place I go to. People outside the gender binary have existed since people have existed but it is only the awareness and the respect and space we give to people that have changed. There are different cultures, like Native American cultures, have had the idea of having a three-spirited person. In Bangladesh, there's a legally recognized third gender there. And they're called the hijras. And I think in the United States, especially in places like UCSC, and I would say pretty much all of California, people who don't identify inside the gender binary want to be recognized for whatever pronouns they want to use. Coming here and having more friends who do identify as being trans, I think just being their friend and seeing

their lived experiences has really changed my opinions about it. I've had different events, like I had one called Pizza Rolls, Not Gender Roles. And in spaces like that, when people are allowed to speak, they'll be like, "Well, it's really triggering to me to hear somebody call me she/her, because that's just not my gender. And it's people telling me that I'm not allowed to be who I am."

So, I think it's really important, once you're conscious about things like pronouns, to just be consistent about them, and to continue to spread them. I think what's hard for me is I feel like I want to make it more of a daily thing, like when I introduce myself to anybody I should start explaining my pronouns. But I've seen mixed results with that. I think it just is a process of seeing how pronouns can be integrated in different settings. I don't start off pretty much any big meetings with people without introducing my pronouns or asking if they feel comfortable sharing theirs.

Vanderscoff: Great. And so, another question I have, which might relate to that is, if you can pick say one or two or three of the other key areas where conversation seemed to be happening around issues that might be polarizing, just following up on the theme that you were introducing about this idea of how do you deal with difference in conversation and call-out culture. I'm curious if you can give examples concretely around what that seems to be gathering around, in your time at UCSC.

Caballero: Mm hmm. I think another really big, polarizing issue has been white privilege. UCSC students have this big group on Facebook called the Official Group of UCSC Students. Especially lately, there have been a lot of posts, and I think throughout my whole time here. But to give a concrete example, a girl posted that she didn't want to be in the student government anymore because they hate white people. That opened the floodgates of different opinions. I feel there's a theme in this school about giving people of color and marginalized groups lots of voice.

So, I think there's a lot of dialogue about white privilege at this school because some people are like well, why, if this school is talking about celebrating so many different identities, why is it like blatantly disregarding one group of people? Isn't that the same thing as racism? I think a lot of people have that viewpoint. Then other people are like, no, you just don't know that because you have that blinder on. There's a lot of miscommunication about the topic and there's a lot of dialogue about it. I think when talking about that topic, it's important to not blame the individual, per se, but to blame more of the system. Like, if you're going to talk about white privilege, I think it's a lot more productive to talk about it in the way that white privilege systematically benefits a certain group just based on their features and not more so of like, "Well, you're white, so you've always been privileged." Because you can't really assume somebody's background just by looking at them, or the experiences that they've gone through. And I don't think that it's fair to discount somebody's lived experiences based on their race.

But I do think that it's an important topic to discuss because it plays a significant role in the United States. The history of America has benefited people from a European background, specifically people from a Western European background. And it's important to discuss those things, not as an accusation or as something that is necessarily bad. I don't think it's a bad thing. And I think that goes into the idea of white guilt. Because it's true, we don't choose what background we come from. And none of us chose the system that we live in. We all were just kind of born into it. But that doesn't mean that we all don't have the power to change it, or we don't have the power to critically engage with it and look at it and then try to come up with solutions to combat it.

So, at least from my end, I see a lot of conversations about white guilt and white privilege and a lot of people being like well, I didn't do anything, so I shouldn't have to feel bad about it. Because they're kind of seeing it as an individual level of like, well I didn't do anything, and I'm not racist, so why do I have to talk about it, or why do I have to feel this way? When I think a lot of the purpose of talking about white privilege or white guilt is to say in the United States,

people with lighter skin tones, or more Anglican sounding names, or people who speak English as a first language and look like a WASP do get more job opportunities, or they're more likely to be in higher income houses. They're just more likely to access more resources in the United States. And it's important to talk about why that is and ways to maybe bridge the gaps between that and people who don't have that same Westernized experience.

Residential Assistant and Programming

Vanderscoff: Thank you. So, if that's one of the key subjects that you've seen coming up again—you mentioned that you've done some programming around this. And I wonder if there are any particular programs that you might—you said you talked about Pizza Rolls, Not Gender Roles, is that right?

Caballero: Mm hmm.

Vanderscoff: That's interesting. So, I'm curious about other examples, then, of how you, as an RA, have built in programming to intersect with some of these larger social or cultural issues that you've mentioned.

Caballero: Like one of the programs I did was that I—I think it was the whole world, I don't remember what I called it. But I took some figures and condensed it, like if the world was full of like 100 people, five of them would know how to read. It had larger themes about people who have been to university, or people who have access to clean water and food, just to show how different everybody's lived experiences are. I think the university, in a lot of way, can just be a bubble—I live in this dorm, and I eat at the dining hall, and I'm with my friends and I study. And we all talk about how much studying sucks. And then I move off campus and I do a different version of that. I think it's really easy to fall into that mindset. So, it's good to be reminded about how different our experience is from the rest of the world, or just to remain critically engaged with it.

I've done a lot of open mic events where people can talk about their experiences of xenophobia or racism, or just talk about things that are really present and real for them. I've done events that are centered around healing when traumatic things have happened in the world or in the community. I do a lot of events where people can just come and talk because I think that they're really important and it's really important to be heard. I would even argue that it's easy to have really superficial dialogues with people when you're at university and not have to delve and engage with different topics. But I would also argue that a lot of people would want to have more than that and having programs like that gives people the opportunity to talk more and to share more and then ultimately just learn more.

Vanderscoff: And one particular programming area that I know you've been involved in, as event planning, is Kresge Presents Pride. So, I wonder if you could talk about how you got involved with that, and then a little bit about what that is.

Caballero: Yeah. So, when I was a freshman, my RA was involved in planning it. And since I really loved her and continue to, I was like, I want to do that, too. Her name is Jessica [Fawn?] and she was like well, I'm in this group, and you all should join if you want. So, I did. And it's been a really good space to plan events. Like KMEC, which is the Kresge Multicultural Education Committee, we do a lot of cultural events throughout the year. And then Pride is our big one. So, we do Dia de los Muertos, and Lunar New Year and International Women's Day. And so, a lot of our focus is on having people learn about different cultures and different viewpoints. We do big posters, like a poster series that we did was changing the name from Hispanic Heritage Month to Latinx Heritage Month. For some people, the word "Hispanic" can be triggering because not every Latino country is from Spain. And there's also this conversation that the word *Hispanic* is a term that university people put on populations of Latino people. It's not something that we as Latinos chose for ourselves. And then the "x" part of it is to include people who are outside the gender binary. I think that is more of continued conversation that

universities across the country and the world have been discussing: how can we be more inclusive of people who don't fit the gender roles that we have?

So Kresge Presents Pride is an annual event that started—this is our twelfth year—so you can do the math. (laughs) We have a community project that people can be involved in. This year we're going to do a wall that's sort of the history of LGBTQ people, and also give some homage to the land that we live on because it belongs to the Ohlone people.

I think a big conversation, going back to topics that I've seen, is the concept of decolonialization—how do you give the land back, or at least honor the land that we live on? Because it *was* taken violently by our country from the native people who have lived here, and even though we learn about it in school, it's not a topic that has historically been discussed a lot, or has been discussed a lot in different spaces. So, this year for our event, we're trying to be very conscious of that and also playing to the role of people who are in the LGBTQIA+ spectrum. And a lot of the event is—we have booths from different organizations, like the Cantu Queer Center, and Beast, which is a group from a local church that is Christians who identify as being LGBTQIA+ and the intersections with that. So, we have a lot of resource support groups for people to talk to and engage with.

We also have performances from different groups on campus, like acapella groups the High Tones, dance groups like Salsita and Haluan. So, we have different performers that come in. And we also usually have a keynote speaker. And this year our keynote is Jennicet Gutierrez**.** And she is a really famous trans, I think trans and trans Latina activist. Trans Latina is its own separate thing, which I wish I knew more information about.

I'm also trying to not to take up too much space on topics that I feel like I don't personally identify with. So that's another thing I'm trying to keep in mind. Yeah, so she's going to be our keynote. And it's really cool this year, because Pride usually starts with a march in the Quarry Plaza and then there are march stops at every college. So, you start in the quarry, and then you

stop at every college and pick up people along the way. So, we have this whole collaborative college-wide connection over our support for LGBTQIA+ people that ends in a huge festival with free food and booths and resources, and live performance and entertainment.

And this year we have a new thing called workshops. So, interns from the Cantu are holding workshops. One of them is how to be accountable as a white person, how to navigate through having white guilt, or just having conversations about it, especially if you are also LGBTQIA. Because I think that plays out differently, being like a QTPOC person, which is like queer trans person of color, than being a white queer person. So, it's discussing differences and ways that you can hold space and the ways that you move through the world that are different, based on what identities you hold. So that is an example of one of our workshops. We have a space that's dedicated specifically for trans people to talk and communicate and give resources to each other. And there's going to be makeup and free makeovers and clothes and stuff, so we have an area where that's dedicated. We have people from the registrar coming in to help with name changes if people want help to change their names—change what their official name is, or change what their official gender is at our school registry.

We also have an open mic area, and we have an area where you can do quiet crafting if the event becomes too overwhelming because of all the things that are happening at once. Yeah, so I think it's a really beautiful event because we have so many people working on it together and we have pretty much the whole campus working to show support for a single community on campus.

There are lots of criticisms about Pride, especially SF Pride or more commercialized ones that I think are really valid and important. When I went to SF Pride, if I didn't know that it was Pride, it would have just seemed like another festival, or another music place. A lot of Prides have been like, all right! Here's a party, let's celebrate. How can it be more capitalized and commercialized? So, with this event on campus, me and everybody else who's helping to

organize it want to be intentional and helpful with what we're trying to achieve, which is how can we provide education and resources and also provide a fun space to affirm the identities of people at our university, and people around the Santa Cruz area. How can we do that? How can we provide that and also have it be a fun time and also be really informative for everybody who comes?

The Student Housing Crisis

Vanderscoff: Thank you for talking about some of the detail on that. Something that's run through a couple of your different answers that I want be sure that we address before we come to some concluding questions is this question of space and housing. So, you've had some insight on that through your own experience, and then also as an RA, and someone involved in organizing. So, I'm curious, then, what's your own perspective on how the housing crisis has impacted your time at UCSC and seems to be impacting the community here in general?

Caballero: I don't think this many people should have to live in such tight quarters, especially for how much we're paying. It's really hard to talk about what solutions we can have. It's really hard to say. Because I think from the inception, we've changed a lot about what Santa Cruz is. I work at Victoria's Secret now. And one of my coworkers who's a Santa Cruz local, we were discussing about why locals hate college students. And I was like, well, it makes sense because we drive up the rent. And she was like well, yeah, that's pretty much it. The perception that a lot of the local community members have is that we're going to pay for rent no matter what because we're going to go to college no matter what, even though spending twelve hundred dollars a month for a room in a house, or spending upwards to like two thousand dollars for a single on campus, is a lot of money, and I would argue that people can't afford it, we will do it in order to get an education here.

I don't think it's necessarily either the fault of Housing, because we do need to provide beds for people and if people want to study here, the dedicated department to making sure that people

have a place to live is the Housing Department. So, I don't know. I would say that I think it is just on like the Regent level then, with Napolitano saying that we have to increase enrollment and we have to get more students. I don't think that we are able to house as many students that are coming in. We just can't build enough housing to house as many students that want to come here. I just think that the level that we're growing at is not possible, but we're still trying to do it, and that's why we have so many problems. That's why I know so many people who live in houses that have mold problems. That's why I know so many people who live in places where they tell me that their landlords are slumlords and they don't repair the things that they have to because they know that if they get fed up and they can't live there anymore, somebody else is going to take the spot. So, why would they? Why would they fix it, then, if they that they don't have to put up with it?

And then with housing on campus, I think it's a shame that the lounges are gone because lounges are ways that people who live in the dorms can go and just hang out with each other and study, and now there aren't spots to do that. They have to go outside or go to a different place. So, I think it's harder to bond with each other. I think just including more people without also including more housing—it takes a tremendous strain. And it's not only with the actual spaces of housing, it's the resources. It's increasing enrollment, but not increasing financial aid. Not increasing LSS, which is the tutoring services. Not being able to increase funding to different areas. It's maxing out all of the supplies that we already have to ensure that more people are coming.

And it's not a problem that we don't want. I don't think people who are really passionate about the housing crisis don't want more people to come. I think most people would agree that having more people means more diversity of experiences, which is ultimately a good thing. I think that the problem is that more people are coming and nobody is accommodating the amount of resource we can give them, so everybody is getting less and less. The system is being spread too thin is my general impression of what's happening.

Financial Struggles

Vanderscoff: And the flipside of this, if you look at the financial side of attending college, you're also going to school at a time of tuition hikes. Could you share something about the economic side of attending UCSC, making that work in this particular climate, with issues, including things like the housing crisis you just mentioned.

Caballero: People are taking on tremendous amounts of debt. Almost everybody I know is in at least like ten thousand dollars' worth of debt. That means that pretty much everybody I know that is going to college is starting their adult lives in the hole. We all have this idea that college is a good experience and we're not going to trade that for anything. But it also means that we have more stress to find good jobs once we graduate. But as more people go to college, the value of a college degree I've seen has been decreasing. And a lot of people are like, well, if you want what the bachelor's degree used to get you, you need to go to higher education. You need to get a master's; you need to get a PhD.

And most master's programs are not funded. PhD programs are generally funded, but they're so hard to get into. I have been seeing a lot of what I would call a rat race—people trying to do their best, and people trying to like—I've met a lot of different people who are like, you know, I'm not working right now, but I'm taking a bunch of loans because I know that I couldn't do both at the same time and I need to get this degree. And I've met other people who are like, "Well, I work two or three jobs in order to make ends meet so that I can even come here." I've seen a tremendous array of people having to spread themselves thin in order to afford going to this place.

But it would be dishonest for me to claim that this is the experience for everybody because there are people here who do have parents that are willing to pay for their rent, or for tuition. But I think even in families where the parents can afford it, there's just a lot of conversation about

okay, my parents are going to pay this off, but that means that they had to take out a second mortgage, or that means that like this happened.

I've really seen people who identify as being middle class being heavily affected by it. Because some people will only be offered loans and some people will not be offered any financial aid and their parents just don't have the capability of paying for it. And that doesn't mean that they shouldn't also get access to going away to university. I don't know. I think I would want to see more services be applied to people who do fall under that bracket. I know that Financial Aid does a middle-class scholarship and they have [the Blue and Gold]. [5] But having more help beyond that would be good.

It just boggles my mind that I look at rent [other places] and I'm like wow, that place is a thousand dollars a month? That's not too bad. Because if I went to a place like Montana, I could get a house for a thousand dollars a month. Just for me. And what I can get for a room here, I could get a whole apartment in another part of the country. Just overall, going to this university requires that you have a lot of money. I think there are a lot of different options of getting that amount of money but it does feel like you do have to have money in order to come here. Even if you're not rich, you have to find a way to make it work, or else you're going to get kicked off.

National Politics

Vanderscoff: So one final thing I want to address before I go into closing questions. I've asked this of everyone here. In between the time that we started talking about this project and actually launching it, a key event that's happened has been the election And then the Trump administration. It comes under this theme of current events and pressing concerns that students might have now. So, what I'd like to ask you is about the impact of that political moment for you as a student here, and then in terms of the climate here.

[5] http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/paying-for-uc/glossary/blue-and-gold/

Caballero: When Trump was elected, the whole week was really sad. I don't think I'd ever seen my Facebook feed be so sad. I'd never seen so many students just openly crying. I think that happened for a lot of different reasons. I think the one that hits the closest to home for me is that Trump had a lot of comments about people who were undocumented and he continues to have this image that people who are undocumented need to leave, and people who are immigrants, especially Muslim people are not Americans. And there are a lot of those students on this campus and in the United States but at UCSC, there were a lot of demonstrations happening because we don't agree with that. We don't want that. That's not our version of America. So, I think having the Trump administration has been hard because a lot of their values on a social level are not aligned with the ones that people at this school believe in.

But on the flipside of that, it's also really strangely vindicating. Because I think for years, people at this campus have said there are people out there who are racist. There are people out there who hate immigrants and want them gone. There are people who are really angry. We are being marginalized. And a lot of people were like, "Oh, no, you're just exaggerating, that doesn't really happen." So now that a lot of those officials are in positions of power, people are like, "Okay, maybe all of you angry college students are right. Maybe you didn't just like think that up by yourself."

In the aftermath of Trump being elected, I was part of a lot of different demonstrations. I had never seen that many people march before from our school. After Trump was elected, I heard lots of people outside and I joined them. And it wasn't a student-organized event. It wasn't like people were like, "We're going to go march together." It wasn't like Pride, where we've had this planned out and we've been planning it. All these people were upset and we all just wanted to go outside and be upset together.

It was really powerful and moving that there were literally thousands of people. And the Quarry Plaza—there are pictures, too—where it's just completely filled. There's a bunch of

people just everywhere. So, I'm happy to go to a place where people are united in not agreeing with the values of the Trump administration than being in a place where people were really happy that he was elected. I feel glad to be in a place where I know that if I wanted to be really critical about this presidency, I wouldn't be seen as being un-American. I think that's a topic that people at UCSC don't articulate a lot. I feel like being able to speak against the government, or being able to speak against values that I don't agree with, is a privilege and it's something that I couldn't say anywhere. I know that if I lived in another place in this country, if I were to speak out, I would be concerned if I was in danger. I'd have to be concerned about my physical safety. I'm sure there are people who've felt that way at UCSC but I do think that there are more protective measures here for people who do have a more liberal standpoint, than in other parts of the country. And I am really thankful and aware of that fact. '

Final Reflections

Vanderscoff: That's great. So, you've articulated a lot of the things that are particular about UCSC and your experience here. And so, to take us full circle back to the expectations that you came in with, I wonder if you wouldn't mind offering some thoughts, or some reflections, about what UCSC has been, for better or for worse, as a place for you to learn and to think from, relative to those expectations that you came in with. And then a very particular situation, where you sort of came in here in this position of defying your parents to some extent. So yeah, just any reflections you might have in that regard, now that you're close to finishing.

Caballero: I've grown up so much because of my experiences here. And I've learned so much. There are a lot of different criticisms which you could have. When I think about it, I understand why people don't like it here. We don't have a big sports team, so it's hard for people to all meet together and cheer on whatever mascot they have. I think, especially if you live in a place like Kresge, it's really hard to meet other freshmen. So, people do feel alone, and they feel like they don't have a sense of community. I think it's hard to live in such an expensive place and to

afford this place. I think if you have conservative viewpoints, it's hard to feel included in dialogues here, because a lot of what we talk about is anti-establishment, anti the system. We don't tend to agree with the current state of politics in the United States. And that can also be polarizing. There's not a lot of talk about religion here. And I know a few people who don't feel like their religious beliefs are, specifically Christian beliefs, are really valued here because people will make comments about how religion can be really polarizing and triggering. I guess religion here can just be a really touchy subject is my main point with that. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: So what would you say as someone coming from a Catholic background, then?

Caballero: I really enjoyed it because where I came from, everybody was really Catholic, and even though I still do see myself as a religious person and I do feel like a spiritual person, I don't agree with a lot of tenets from Catholicism. I do think it's possible to be Catholic and still be pro-choice, for example. But for me that doesn't feel very authentic. And a lot of Catholic agencies and a lot of Catholic thought is like—you never defy your parents. You get married. And you are not homosexual. They have a lot of really traditional values. And UCSC isn't really a place for traditional values. So, what I mean by saying that, is I see why [some] people don't like it.

But I do think UCSC is a really great place if you're somebody who wants to be involved in organizing. And there are a lot of different opinions about that, I know. Some people don't feel like this place is good for organizing and some people do. But at least from my experiences here, if you are persistent enough about having a voice in the matter, somebody will allow for you to have a seat at the table and I think that that is important.

This place is also really good if you enjoy nature and if you didn't necessarily like sports, or if you didn't necessarily like having more of a traditional school experience. This is a really good place if you are really good at being independent, too, and finding whatever connections you have. UCSC, bottom line, is a place where you can make your experience what you want. If you

want to be in Greek life, you can find the Greek life and be heavily involved in it. If you want to be in student organizing, you can find it and be involved in it. If you want to find a cultural center and be really involved in it, you can find it and be involved. I think it's a little harder because you do have to go and find the places. I feel like at this place, you do have to find whatever you want. But I think that's a really valuable life skill. (laughs) And there can be disagreement. So, bottom line, UCSC is a really unique and interesting place and you can just do so many different things with your time here.

Vanderscoff: So another full circle thing I'd like to talk about is you mentioned that you never expected you would get into this place, or to UCs in general. And so, you started out talking about themes of confidence and then a sense of what you could or maybe couldn't do as a student. So, if you reflect on that moment, your first intersection with UCSC, and then where you are now, what's happened to that thread, that question of you knowing about what you're good at in terms of your own capabilities or confidence as a student now that you're at the end of your degree here?

Caballero: I've changed a lot about my thinking as a student. I've realized that even if I'm not a 4.0, like—loves school, will be at the library person—that doesn't mean that I'm not smart. When I was in Oxnard and when I was in high school, I was really, really concerned about what people thought about me. I was really concerned about well, if I start to think that I'm a smart person, then I'm going to be full of myself. Then I'm just going to be a terrible person and things are going to be bad. 'During my time here I've really learned, through taking student leadership roles and being involved in the groups that I have been, and just working and being a student, and being involved in discussions and planning and organizing, I've gained a lot of confidence in who I am. I know myself a lot better than I did when I was like seventeen. The self-awareness I had at seventeen is a lot different than the self-awareness I have now. I tend to be really critical and hard on myself. I don't think that part has changed at all. I think I'm still pretty hard on myself. But I've learned to be like, okay, well, Sam, I know that you think that you talk too

much, and you think that you need to change X, Y and Z, but you know that not everybody thinks of you that way, because you've had these jobs where people tell you that you're not X, Y and Z. And if you really are terrible, then why would you voluntarily put on events that you don't get paid for? Or why would you voluntarily do this? So, it has been a lot of just talking to different people, and the different mentors that I've met. Like Pam Ackerman, who is the CPC [College Programs Coordinator] at Kresge, and Megan Gnekow, who is the CC [Coordinator for Conduct and Education] at Cowell. UCSC loves acronyms. I don't know why. (laughter) And faculty at UCSC have been really instrumental in teaching us that we are capable as students, but we're also capable of doing things outside of the classroom. Throughout my time here, I've just made UCSC what I've wanted it to be. I do feel like I belong here. And as I graduate, I am really happy that I chose to go to the school that I did, and meet the people that I did. I like where I am right now and I'm going to like whatever future I have. And even if I don't necessarily like those things, I think that they're all worth it and valuable.

Vanderscoff: Right. And one thing is, one part of an education is translating it at home. So as far as then communicating that to folks back home, you mentioned that you came here sort of in defiance of your parents. So then, what has the process been of communicating these things that you're telling me and translating them back home, back to Oxnard with your family or with your community there.

Caballero: One of the things that I've tried to do a lot at UCSC was if your activism, or if the ideas that you have in a university can't be translated down to other communities, like if you are really passionate about uplifting marginalized communities—if you can't translate that back into the community, into a marginalized community, especially if you're from one, then who is your activism really for? It's one thing to talk about it—let's say, in this interview or in the library or to people who are already at university —about well, the school that I'm at doesn't have access to resources. It's one thing to talk about it in a school paper. And it's a whole different thing to go back [to your community] and discuss those ideas.

So even though I don't go back to Oxnard regularly, I do try to keep in contact with the different teachers that I've had and share with them some of the ideas that I've learned here, or just places and things that students can do. And when I go home and talk to my parents, I do try to discuss with them like, don't say the "f" word—not like f-u-c-k, the other one, to be explicit. (laughs) Don't say those words. Because you want to be respectful of people.

Or a really good example is I went home and like my dad and my neighbors, who are all immigrants from Mexico, were talking about how, like the Muslim ban is great because Muslims all come to this country to bomb it. And I was like, "Well, do you like how he treats Mexicans, saying that we all come here to rape people, and we come here to steal people's jobs?" And they were like, "No, but that's not true." And I was like, "Well, try to think about that with Muslims. When you guys came here, did you want to just destroy the United States? Did you want to kill all the values? Like when you came to this country, why did you do it?" And they're like, "Well, we didn't have anything in Mexico. We went to the United States because we thought we would get more opportunities." So, I said, 'That's the same thing that Muslim people want to do." And I was like, "Yeah, and we're Catholics, and Catholics did this thing called the Crusades where we killed a lot of people for not being Catholic. Do you think that was right?" And they're like, "No!" And I'm like, "Well, with Muslims, the suicide bombers are part of a really extremist sect of Muslim and Islam and so were the people who did the Crusades." And so, I'm like, "A lot of religions have this really bad side to it and you can't use that as an excuse to completely disregard a whole sect of people." And they were like, "You know, we never thought of it that way. That's true."

So, I think it's really important to try to bridge gaps between communities that you're coming from and what you learn. I get that it can be really frustrating because not all the conversations have had that ending. I try to talk a lot to my family and just people that I knew back at home about why people should respect pronouns, or people should respect people who are gay. And they're like, "No! Why would I do that? Those people are just disgusting and that's not what

God wanted us to do." I've had reactions where it just goes around in a circle, where I'm like, "No, God doesn't explicitly ever talk about being gay. And if you look at the Bible, Sodom and Gomorrah, he doesn't ever say, 'You're gay, you can't do that.' But it does talk about you can't mix fabrics and you can't—" I go into these thinkings a lot. 'And then it always just ends up being like, I don't agree with you. Bye.

But regardless of if you can convince people, I think it's really important to still have dialogues and to talk because, I think first of all, you learn a lot about where other people are coming from the examples that they give. And also, even if the person isn't convinced, they still heard what you said and other people probably also heard, so you're still impacting people.

Vanderscoff: That's great. So, the final question is, you're about to graduate. What's next? To whatever extent you might know, or have ideas, I'd be curious to hear them.

Caballero: (laughs) Well, I know I'm not going to be a research scientist. I've gone through the list of things that I'm not going to do. (laughs) I originally was going to apply to grad school and then do the sciences. And once I started to study for the GRE, it just hit me that I can't do it. I need some time to not be a student, so I'm going to take at least a year off. And during that time, I'm going to work. I don't know where I'm going to work yet. But if you hit me up in like a year, I can probably tell you. (laughter) I think my most immediate plan is that I'm probably going to stay around the area. I've been applying to different jobs. So hopefully, I get hired.

Vanderscoff: Great. And so then beyond that, maybe an idea of possibly returning to school or—

Caballero: Yeah. I think I might return to school. No matter what job I get or what I do, I know that I'm still really interested in planning events. What I know about myself is I do really like community organizing. So, no matter what I do, I'm going to be involved in spaces where that's a present thing.

Vanderscoff: Well, great. Unless, is there's anything else you'd like to say in closing before we turn this off?

Caballero: I don't know. If you want to continue, if you're upset with anything I said, or want to continue talking about it, you can probably contact whoever is in charge of this ultimately. I don't know if it's still going to be Cameron. And then they can forward whatever it is to me, and then we can talk about it. I feel like that's fair. I don't think that it would be smart for me to just publicly give out my contact information. But I can be contacted. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: Great. So, this interview itself can serve as a point of dialogue with interested people. I think that's great and that's totally in the spirit of what you've been saying today in terms of community. So, on my end, I'd like to thank you very much for your time, for sitting down through our venue change that we've just had [from our original room to the library stacks]. And more importantly, just for sharing about yourself and all the work that you're doing on this campus.

Caballero: Thank you.

Vanderscoff: With that, we'll close off this record.

Carl Eadler

At the time of this interview, Carl Eadler was a fifth-year senior triple major in mathematics, computer science, and network and digital technology, with a minor in STEM education. He was a Kresge College student, where he served as an orientation leader, program assistant, and chaired the Kresge Parliament. He is also a founder of the student organization Slugs United by Math. Eadler grew up in Nashville, Tennessee. His parents both passed away during his childhood; he became a foster youth who found vital help in UC Santa Cruz's Smith Renaissance Society.

Vanderscoff: Today is Monday, April 17, 2017, and this is Cameron Vanderscoff here for the Student Interviews Project at UC Santa Cruz. The way we've been beginning these interviews is asking folks to introduce themselves, identify themselves, in whatever words they choose. And then just start us off by providing a little bit of background.

Eadler: All right. My name is Carl Eadler. I am a fifth-year student here at UC Santa Cruz. I'm currently twenty-three years old. I am triple majoring and pursing a minor. 'My majors are in computer science, mathematics, and network and digital technology. My minor is in STEM education. I'm originally from Nashville, Tennessee. I moved out here right after high school, when I was eighteen, and I've been living here ever since.

Early Background

Vanderscoff: Great. You're the first person we've had in the project who's actually from out of state as well, so, we'll explore some of those dynamics. But first of all, if you could just share a bit about your personal background, and then your educational background.

Eadler: So personal background being before I came to school?

Vanderscoff: Yeah, before you came here, family background, community background. Anything you'd like to share about that.

Eadler: So I was born in Madison, Tennessee; I grew up in Madison, Tennessee. As a kid, we moved all over the place due to some parental issues. When I was eight, my mom passed away. I was living with my dad; he was a single dad for the next eight years, until he also passed away, at which point I moved in with my aunt and uncle in downtown Nashville. I finished up high school with them and then made my way out here.

So, when I was going into ninth grade, the nearby high school that I was going to be zoned to was a big public school. It was in an impoverished neighborhood and very frequently you would see on the nightly news cases of riots, or fights, or police getting called to it. For these reasons, my dad thought it was a very violent high school and he didn't want to send me there. So, he ended up sending me to a private school. This was around the time where I was discovering my own stance on religion and such and discovering that I'm somewhere in the agnostic/atheist zone. But he decided to send me to a fundamentalist Southern Baptist private school, not because he necessarily wanted me to go to a Christian school, just because it was the nearest school available that wasn't the public school.

So that was an interesting two years. In biology, instead of talking about useful things like how DNA and RNA work and stuff like that, and lots of hard concepts, we spent a lot of time talking about why evolution doesn't exist. They weren't really so interested in teaching us biology. They were more interested in trying to impose their views on us. I distinctly remember in Bible class at that school being told that if you're not being hated for spreading the word of God, you're not doing your job as a Christian, which I thought was a little extreme, and definitely that mindset explains some of the personality behind evangelist Christians sometimes, especially the Southern Baptists, who carry this fervently with them.

So, after my dad passed away—that was the middle of tenth grade—I finished up that year there. But then when I moved in with my aunt and uncle, I enrolled in a public school nearby that had a vastly better educational outlook on life and many, many, many more opportunities.

There was no calculus class at my private school; there was only pre-calculus. Though, come to find out, actually, the only calculus teacher at the public school quit senior year and they weren't able to replace him in time for the next year.

But junior year was good. It was very different from all of my other educational experiences. And, of course, coming into a school in eleventh grade in a four-year high school—you know, you're a bit of the black sheep coming in. Definitely there was a cohort that was already well-developed and it was hard for me to find my way in there. But by senior year, I found my way into a couple of cohorts that were pretty cool.

We got a new principal a year or two prior to my joining the school and the new principal and the teachers—some sort of falling out happened between them and I think something on the order of ten or fifteen teachers quit working at the school. And it's a school of about 1200 students, so ten or fifteen teachers is a pretty sizable magnitude to lose in one year. I remember we lost the piano teacher; I think the photography teacher; our only calculus teacher; our only physics teacher.

I came into the public school knowing that I really liked math; I wanted to do more with math; I knew that I wanted to take calculus my senior year. So, I talked to the guidance counselor there and she said that dual enrollment is an option—going to the local community college while being enrolled in high school.

So, I ended up doing that. And there was one other student, actually in three of my classes at high school who was taking the same calculus class for the same reason. He didn't want to go to college without having taken calculus. He wanted to continue doing as much math as he possibly could.

And so, fall of my senior year, that would be fall 2011—I was taking Calc 1 there and then after passing that after the semester had ended, I decided I might as well take Calc 1 because I

enjoyed my time there a lot at the community college. Also, I was getting into programming at this point. I'll explain a little bit more about that in a moment. I also decided I would be interested in taking a computer science class there. So, I enrolled in another math class and a computer science class before enrolling in UCSC. That was really cool. I enjoyed that a lot. I had this really crazy schedule because the computer science class met once a week on Wednesdays. It was a four-hour class because of the fact that it met once a week and it was right after the calculus class, which met twice a week, and it was about a two-hour class. This is in addition to going to high school. So, I woke up for high school at 5:30 in the morning—would take a shower, eat breakfast, get out of the house, get to school by 7:05. High school ended at 2:30, something like that. I had maybe an hour break between to grab a little bit of dinner or snack or something like that. Calculus was from 3:30 till 5:30 and then the computer science class was from 6:00 till 10:00. So, I was learning from 7:00 am to 10:00 pm on Wednesdays. Other days weren't nearly as heavy, but they still had their own challenges and obstacles to them.

But I originally got into computer science when I was probably eleven or twelve. My friend brought over a copy of Macromedia Flash, which is the same as Adobe Flash, but it was before Adobe had bought it. And of the time—we were very interested in watching these little flash cartoons and playing all the flash games on sites like Miniclip.com and Albino Blacksheep and stuff like that, eBaum's World. Typical early 2000s internet culture. I got kind of interested in making little movies and stuff. The animations were pretty fun.

And then, I started to realize, you know, some of these movies get kind of fancy. They have these pause and play buttons and stuff. These look really cool. So, I started messing around saying, how can I add these into my own movies? Which is, of course, done through code, specifically action script in Adobe Flash. I got more and more heavily involved in doing that. By the time I was sixteen, I knew how to program decently well in action script and I started making programs that were independent of any sort of animation or anything like that, just for fun. And usually, when I was seventeen or so, I was making programs that specifically

answered math questions. I found I really liked doing calculations like this. It's kind of fun. I was specifically interested in this problem the summer between tenth grade and eleventh grade, where you take one square and then you kind of put that on two squares, and you put that on three squares, and you get this little pyramid happening where you have sum of a bunch of squares: one plus two plus three plus four plus five. And I was just thinking, huh. I wonder if there's a way to have like a little formula, a little expression for this?

I was out here visiting my sister. My sister at the time lived in San Jose. And we were out in Santana Row watching a jazz quartet thing that her father-in-law was performing in. I had a notebook and I was totally zoned out. The music was good but I was totally zoned out at the time. I was looking in my notebook thinking huh, this is kind of weird. How do you—is this possible? And then I look at it and I look at it and I realize oh, that's the solution. I figured it out all of a sudden. I remember feeling so inspired by that.

And then, I ended up making the problem a little harder and saying okay, well what if instead of being in like one-dimensional, a one-dimensional pyramid that kind of looks triangular, what if it were two-dimensional? So, you have one plus four plus nine plus sixteen, basically the sum of all the squares. One, four, nine, sixteen, twenty-five. How do you do that? That one took me about two or three weeks. I was out visiting my sister. And I just remember looking at this problem in bewilderment. And, of course, I had very little mathematical background to be able to actually attempt and solve this problem at the time. But I remember being very invested in this for two weeks. And I came out of that summer like wow, I really like math. Huh, that's interesting. So that was cool.

Vanderscoff: So you started to develop a sense of clearly what we might call your vocational or your intellectual interests. And then it's coming to this point where you're combining this with this sort of intensive extracurricular study, essentially, through the community college.

Eadler: Right.

Vanderscoff: So out of all of all of this mix, could you tell us the story of how you decided to go to college to pursue these things in the first place, and then hearing about Santa Cruz in particular?

Eadler: So I think for me, college has always been a no-brainer. Everyone in my family has always encouraged me to go to college, always encouraged me to get an education. My dad was self-employed. He was a carpenter. He spent some time in college but he never ended up getting a degree. He worked with his hands for forty years in various factories for a while and then later on in life he became a carpenter. He had a business called Rescue Remodeling. So he would go into people's homes, you know, if there was some sort of issue. He'd patch up some drywall, make small amendments to the room and such. He would come home from work and he would be totally exhausted after trying to construct a brick wall somewhere, or something like that. Working with his hands all day, on his feet for eight hours, sometimes more, laying tiles on his knees. He always said, "Carl, get a desk job. Definitely get a desk job."

I hadn't worked yet I didn't know how hard what he was doing was, or how, in comparison, how not physically taxing a desk job is. But he definitely always pushed me to do better educationally. Him putting me in the private school was him trying to further my educational opportunities and stuff like that, even though we were dirt poor. He was bringing in fifteen thousand a year to support the two of us. In retrospect, I'm amazed that he was able to do that. I'm amazed that I had food on my table at the end of the day. We were living in a tiny little apartment out in Madison, kind of out in the sticks.

And looking back on it, the food I was eating definitely wasn't very nutritional; it wasn't very good. Circumstances, our furniture, a lot of the amenities, it wasn't there. But I didn't know that I was missing that, right? Because I didn't know any other life. Yeah, so he definitely always pushed me.

After he passed away, my aunt and uncle, both of them college-educated. My uncle had a master's. My aunt had her bachelor's. It was a no-brainer for them and they did everything they could do to encourage me and push me, as far as helping me register for the SAT, ACT, looking at colleges, stuff like that. So, there was sort of no question about it for me, personally, that my family wanted me to try as hard as I could to get in a school.

As far as Santa Cruz goes, I ended up here because I didn't want to be in Tennessee. With my sister nearby—I kind of wanted to have a home base, right? I wanted to have someone nearby where I had some resources, if need be, stuff like that. Because it's definitely hard to move out entirely on your own with no safety net anywhere. And I was definitely very done living in Tennessee. (pauses) I'm trying to think about how I'm trying to phrase this. But I didn't want to move to somewhere that I had no tie at all to, right? I've been visiting California since I was nine. I took my first plane ride out here when I was nine to visit my sister. I came with my same aunt who I was living with as a teenager. If I recall, she was babysitting for somebody while one of her family members went on vacation or something. I don't quite recall the story. But I just remember loving it out here. It was great. The temperature's nice; there's a lot of fun stuff to do. My sister especially likes entertaining guests when they come out.

A sort of funny aside story—I remember as I was getting older I'd come visit. And she was like, "Yeah, I just don't know what to do with you this summer." I'm perfectly fine just hanging out and talking and making dinner at the end of the day and stuff. I [said], "You don't need to entertain me."

But I came periodically. I visited again, I think when I was twelve and then again when I was fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, and ended up really just liking it out here. It's just really nice having so much so close by. And mixed with the fact that I was coming from a fundamentalist Southern Baptist school where they were telling me things like, and I quote, "The wildfires and earthquakes in California are God's punishment for the gays," and, you know, other beautiful

things like, "Oh, when you move to California, don't go gay." Because you know, that's how it happens, right? You just move to California and bam, you're gay. (laughter)

I was pretty ready to move out. There's a lot of very bigoted people in Nashville. A lot of homophobia. A lot of racism. Nashville itself isn't too bad. The downtown area—within a five-mile radius, it's extremely progressive, it's extremely liberal. But if you go thirty minutes outside of the city in any direction, you find yourself in the sticks. It gets to be a little questionable. It's not too bad, but in terms of where I want to spend my formative years, I would much rather spend it out here where people are nice.

So that being the case, senior year I applied to MIT; I applied to Tennessee Tech; I applied to Michigan, Ann Arbor. Then I applied to Berkeley and Santa Cruz. Santa Cruz is the one California school I got accepted to, so I ended up just deciding to come here. Didn't get accepted at MIT, which wasn't really a surprise. I didn't have the strongest high school performance. But you know, it was a possibility, so I thought I might as well apply. I didn't really want to go to Michigan or Tennessee Tech, Tennessee Tech, of course, being the backup school just in case.

Coming to UC Santa Cruz

So, I got in here. Fun fact: I never visited the campus before I came. I get that email that says, "You've been accepted. Here's the online tour." So, I go on Google Maps and I look at street view and I kind of check out the campus. But it's kind of hard. It's hard to see what's going on, on this campus, because Google street view really only captures so much of the campus just because there's so many trees. So, I really had no clue what I was getting into coming out of high school. And, of course, I got invited to the Spring Spotlight and the summer tours and stuff like that. But living 2300 miles away, it's hard to make it out here, especially when you don't have any money. You can't really pay for a plane ticket, much less you're a senior in high school. You can't really just take time off of school sometimes.

So, my first day on campus was about a month before school started. I had some paperwork I had to turn in and I just decided I'm going to see what taking public transit is like in the Bay Area. So, I made a plan. Took the light rail from San Jose to Diridon. Took the 17 down here and then walked from the Metro Center downtown all the way up to Hahn Student Services up here. It was fun. It was a nice day. Just kind of checking it out. That was my first time on campus and I just remember thinking wow, this is a big campus and it's full of a whole bunch of empty fields. Because I walked up Hagar and I remember thinking, I'm really exhausted, so I'm going to take a bus back. (laughs) So I took the bus off campus.

And then my other plan for that day was to go to Capitola because a distant family member of my brother-in-law owns a pizza shop out in Capitola. I decided, oh, it's only a couple miles away. I might as well check it out. So, I ended up walking out there because it was nice and flat. It didn't have the hill in front of me. And yeah, walked all the way to Capitola and back that day. It was good. I had a pretty nasty sunburn. That was my first time in Santa Cruz.

Kresge College

I didn't visit again until move-in day. And move-in day was scary. So, the way Kresge does it, to alleviate the traffic stuff, is they have two move-in waves. So, they have an 8:00 am wave and a 10:00 am wave. And that way, you're not waiting in line all day to get a parking spot. It alleviates a lot of the traffic problems on campus. Having worked move-in four times now, I have seen the other side and I definitely understand why it's there.

But I had the 10:00 am wave. I think all of my roommates had the 8:00 am wave. And I remember talking to my sister earlier in the week. And she was like, "Yeah, I've got this going on that day. I won't be able to help you move in." And I'm like, "Wait, wait a second. You mean, I'm moving myself all the way in?" Like, oh, wow. I'm really on my own now. Oh my gosh. And it was a little like deer in the headlights for a while.

I get to campus and there's so many different people you see on that first thirty minutes on campus who are all telling you where to go, and you don't even know where you're going, and you're trying to work with them. I just remember being like, "Hi. Help me, please. I don't know where I'm going."

But the people at Kresge were really helpful and when I finally found where I was supposed to be and got a parking spot, they told me I had like thirty minutes to unload all of my stuff. And I'm like, what do I do after that? What happens after thirty minutes? Oh, no. I don't want to get a ticket. It's my first day on campus.

And I just remember the grounds lady from Kresge, Cat. She's really nice. She was driving around on her little golf cart that she uses for the groundskeeping work, you know, transport shovels and rakes and such. And what she does on move-in day is she just takes her golf cart and when she sees somebody who needs some help getting their luggage and their belongings from Place A to Place B, she just ends up saying, "Throw it on the cart," and she'll drive it up to the apartment for you. And I just remember thinking like wow. Here I am freaking out about just being totally scared about this entire experience that I'm about to embark on. And people are being so nice to try and help me out here. It was good.

And then I ended up getting to the apartment and everybody else had moved in. I was in a triple, so I had two roommates. And they had both already claimed their spots in the room. And there was no communication on it. I was like wow, that's weird. Luckily, I got the spot that I wanted. I wanted the bunk bed. I wanted top bunk on the bunk bed. But I just remember thinking like whoa, this is really weird. There's already an existing social dynamic going on and I'm like the last one to the party here. Oh, this feels weird! Yeah. That was sort of my experience getting here.

Vanderscoff: How did you wind up in Kresge in the first place, as opposed to another college?

Eadler: I don't know. I actually don't know. They send out that list when you get accepted, with the ten colleges, and with their mission statement and what they stand for and the amenities available, and a little bit about it here and there. But honestly, you don't know *anything* about these places from that thing. It's almost entirely useless. They all kind of sound exactly the same.

I remember Googling what are the stereotypes and it popped up with Yahoo answers, which now I'm pretty much like yeah, those are definitely the stereotypes. Those are pretty well-confirmed.

I honestly think that I applied to Crown. I'm pretty sure that my initial choice was Crown. And I think I ended up getting placed in Kresge, but I don't remember exactly why I chose any of them. Other than, I just remember there was a music practice room on the list and I think I just put the ones with music practice rooms up top because I was getting a little bit into guitar and drums senior year. I've always liked music a lot. But unfortunately, just being here and being a student who takes an inordinate number of classes, I don't have much time to practice music usually. I think that's how I ended up in Kresge. But I don't know all the factors that went into it; I don't think Kresge was my first choice, but I honestly don't remember. It was so long ago. It would be interesting to find that in a historical record if that's available somewhere. And pull that out and see what I put on that piece of paper. But I don't know if those are even kept around. And if so, how to access it.

Vanderscoff: So you wind up at Kresge and you're described your experience of moving in. So then if we expand our scope to talking about your early weeks and months here, I'm curious about what your impressions of this place were, I suppose not only as Santa Cruz, but as California, as not Tennessee, relative to coming from Nashville and Madison and all that. So, this could be the Kresge core course, for example; this could be early classes, or early social situations—just things that stand out for you in retrospect.

Eadler: Yeah. So, some of my really early memories of the first month or so on campus are going to the OPERS resource fair down there. And then Kresge had its own little resource fair up here that they do every year. I remember going to the resource fair and saying, wow, there is a club for just about everything on campus! It's really amazing that there's so much here. I don't even know where to start, right?

I didn't really join any clubs early on to begin with. I joined Kresge Parliament. Because, unlike a lot of other student governments, Kresge Parliament is really concerned with improving Kresge and trying to give a voice to Kresge students to change the community that they're living in. A lot of students, they'll say, "It would be really nice if we had this," or, "Is it possible that we can do something about this problem that's going on?" And really, Kresge parliament is the way to about that. So, I joined parliament my first week. I liked it a lot. I don't think I've missed but maybe one or two meetings since. I remember at the Kresge Resource Fair the Community Aid and Resources project had set up a little table. I think that was their first or second year as a more official organization. Much smaller than a lot of the organizations that were at OPERS at the time. I remember going to all of the orientation leader events that Kresge throws. So, they have a night hike that they do at the beginning of the year, where everybody gets a glow stick necklace or bracelet or whatever, and we all go hike up into the woods, and basically, we tell some Kresge history mixed with some weird rituals and stuff that we do every year. It's a lot of fun.

Vanderscoff: What kind of history? I mean, Kresge does have an interesting—

Eadler: Well, we tell people about the fact that we don't have an endowment anymore because the Kresge family came in and saw the debauchery that was going on in the seventies at Kresge and were like, "We don't want our name associated with this," or whatever it was. I don't know if we even know the true story anymore. But you know, it just gets told down more and more every year. We talk about how Kresge seceded in the nineties and some of that that went on.

Vanderscoff: Seceded in the sense of—for the record.

Eadler: So, Kresge tried to secede from the university, in the sense of they wouldn't let you pass into Kresge unless you had like a Kresge passport. This is the story that I've been told. You could get one if you were a resident of Kresge, or if you had a class in Kresge. But otherwise, people weren't allowed to cross into Kresge. It was kind of a statement of Kresge not really totally agreeing with the rest of the university and the way things were going, in terms of just how UCSC wanted to expand and some of the decisions they were making. That was about, I think, the time when departments were becoming unaligned from the colleges and stuff like that. I'm not entirely sure all the political things. It's in some newspapers. I've glanced at the articles but I don't have them memorized. But when we go up to the tanks up there, we tell them about how—

Vanderscoff: Are these the tanks up past Colleges Nine and Ten—

Eadler: Yes. Kresge's been a very free and independent place for the last forty years now. And it makes sense, because we have apartments; we're kind of up here secluded in the woods and stuff. It's a very interesting place to be. Definitely lends itself to a lot of individuality and personal growth and stuff like that.

So, I ended up going to a lot of the events that the orientation leaders do, like that. And they throw a dance and they have little arts and crafts things. Because senior year of high school, I was involved with volunteering with a place in Nashville called Rocketown. Rocketown is an all-ages music venue/afterschool program/skate part/teen hangout space. It was really cool. When you hear about teen hangout space, you kind of think that sounds kind of lame. And honestly, I think Rocketown just kind of has the perfect combination of a whole bunch of different elements and everybody there is really authentic about what they do.

I was volunteering at the shows. And we would help if there were an event where—maybe it's a dinner or something like that, we would unfold all the chairs and sets up the tables and stuff and cover them with table cloths and what not. At the music shows, it was matter of sweeping up at the end of the night, cleaning the bathrooms, putting wristbands on patrons' wrists and stuff like that. Certainly not terribly hard work, especially for getting basically a free concert ticket. And whether you like the band or not for the night, it's fun to go out and hang out with the other volunteers and stuff.

We had this tradition of after the concert was over, there was a burrito place that was open till 4:00 am. And often we would all just go over there and we would all get burritos. It was great.

So, I come from a place of a lot of volunteerism and stuff like that. I remember after all the orientation leader events, I kept on helping them clean up. And they're like, who's this kid and why is he helping us clean up? This is our job. Why is he doing this? I'm like oh, I just like helping out. And they kept on saying, "You should be an orientation leader next year. You should involve yourself. If you like helping out and doing these things, you should definitely apply. Because this is what we do. We get to throw these events." I was like, "That sounds great." So basically, the whole year I was anticipating for the interview and the application to come out. And that was not even an issue.

Also ended up applying to the Kresge Programs Office, which does a lot of similar things, basically just adding a social component, a student life component to the residents' academic endeavors here at school. The programs office is responsible for hosting a little tea party or something to help people destress, or arts and crafts events and stuff like that—to try and give people more social opportunities here at school. And it's all sort of wrapped up in there.

So, freshman year I'm getting involved in parliament, and orientation leader stuff, and the programs office, and the Community Aid and Resources project. It took me a while to actually start going to the CARE meetings—Community Aid and Resources— because I was a little

busy. But I was on their email list and I kept getting emails. And one week I ended up just saying, "You know, this is a good time for me," so I'll end up going to a meeting. And I really like what they're about. They're trying to help out homeless people in the area. The mission statement really boils down to "serving the underserved", in whatever capacity that means. And, of course, in Santa Cruz, we have a really large homeless population. And so, their mission really definitely aligned with a lot of my personal beliefs in trying to help people and make the community a better place.

They do their work mostly by going down to the homeless shelter there at the corner of Highway 1 and Highway 9. They collect a whole bunch of resources all quarter long. And then somewhere near the end of the quarter, a couple of weeks before finals, we'll bring twenty-ish volunteers down there and we'll wash people's feet; we cut their hair; we distribute socks. Sometimes we've distributed clothing. We used to get a dentist; tried to regularly. And they would bring some sort of mobile chair or something like that and they would do whatever sort of triage work they could really get done. We'd bring a doctor. We had contacts with one on campus who worked at the health center for a while. We would try and bring all these resources down to the shelter. Really, *we* come to them. There's probably other resources that we tried to get involved with. But that's what they're about.

When I was a kid, my dad—one of his main stable places of work for a long time was working to construct a homeless shelter in downtown Nashville. So, I remember when I was two, three years old, going down to this homeless shelter and my dad is building beds for them to sleep in. It's definitely been a big value of his; it was a big value of his for a long time to try and do what he could for people who were less fortunate than himself. And so, I've always had that trying to help out people aspect. So, it was kind of getting involved with all that freshman year. That's sort of where I was at personally.

Vanderscoff: We'll follow those threads through your time here. I'd like to get a little bit deeper with this idea of being in California as opposed to Tennessee. So, you've had the interesting experience of receiving a Southern Baptist education and then coming to Kresge College, which are two different trajectories. (laughs)

Eadler: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: Anyway, so I'm curious if you could reflect on the academic or educational aspect of your early time here, which might be the core course, early courses, or just the sorts of conversations that you were taking part in, as a way of reflecting on what was distinct to you about UCSC.

Eadler: That's really hard to say. In Nashville, I already tried to surround myself with similarly minded people, so a lot of my friends were fairly progressive. The school I was going to was downtown in a pretty liberal area. So that was already fairly progressive. So, it's hard to say how people—in my personal life and some of those conversations—how different they really were.

Academic Experience

(pauses) Academically speaking, just coming to college, the work is much harder, right? Especially at a four-year university as compared to a high school and community college experience. I remember everyone saying that the core course was kind of a joke; it's really easy. It shouldn't be your hardest class by far; it should not be a hard class. It's trying to acclimate you to college, and also teaching you how to write, which is sort of a strange conjunction, I think. It kind of has too many facets on it in trying to be sufficient in all of them. I think, to some extent, maybe it should focus on one or the other. But regardless, it's an interesting class. And it varies, of course, by professor to professor, too.

But everybody always said, "Oh, core's really easy. Core's really easy." And then I ended up getting a B plus. I'm like wait, how did that happen? Okay. Because I know myself; I'm definitely not that bad of a writer. And I was kind of curious about that. I think it came down to the fact that my final project for the class was honestly a little bit silly. I didn't really understand the scope of the final project until I saw everybody else's final project. I really had no clue what I wanted to do with it. A lot of people choose to make art or some sort of tangible project that actually helps interface with some of the themes of the course. So, some people make films about—like someone may go downtown and film some of the homeless people and talk about some of the issues that are facing them, and then distribute the film. And they do these nice, kind of largescale, large media things that really help people engage with some of the problems in this community and the political atmosphere in general.

I couldn't figure out what I wanted to do. Four of my apartment-mates freshman year were also in the same course with the same teacher, but in a different time section. So, same class, same professor, just they had theirs at noon and I had mine at two, or something like that. But we ended up getting him to agree to allow the five of us to do a project together. And we ended up painting this rabbit on a bed sheet and we wrote a one-page essay about how painting the rabbit together symbolized our togetherness as an apartment, or something like that. Looking back on it, (laughs) I kind of wish maybe I had undertaken a bit more of a serious project. But being under the time constraint of you have to get this project done in two weeks, mixed with I'm really not sure what I want to do with this project—it was kind of the best I could do at the time and it's probably why I ended up getting a B.

Needless to say, all the apartment mates, we held onto that tapestry for a long time. Six of the eight of us who were in the apartment—they all moved into a place off campus together and they hung it up on their front door right behind the glass as a type of blinds. I think it's still there. I drive by it all the time. I see it. So, it definitely lasted. And it definitely symbolized togetherness among everybody.

Academically, educationally—what else was different? [pause] It's really hard to say because it's so different than high school and it's so different than what I was doing at community college, especially because my very first quarter here, the credit from having taken calculus at the community college, I was told that it was going to transfer automatically, because whoever I called thought that I was a transfer student and they have a different process and such. But I had just taken a class or two; it wasn't that I was formally enrolled as a student at the community college. I was told they were going to transfer automatically and so I didn't do anything about it. And then come to find out, after the time to enroll had passed, that oh, these things actually didn't transfer automatically and I actually needed to make a couple of calls here and there and get a petition signed and stuff like that. And because of that, I wasn't able to enroll in anything relevant to what I wanted to study at the time. So, I ended up picking Astronomy 1 and Philosophy 11, which are both just intro courses to each of their respective subjects.

The philosophy class was really interesting because it was nothing like I had ever really experienced before. Philosophical thought was certainly not a topic that was taught at the high school. They're not even teaching calculus at the high school, so what chance does philosophy have, something that's that intangible? That was a really interesting course because you're talking about like, how do you know that we even exist? And like gravity, it's weird! Why does gravity exist? And all these super strange things. It was so radically different, it's hard to even say all the ways that it was different. Because now I'm taking things that—they aren't relevant directly to what I wanted to be studying that first year. And they aren't super tangible. Like philosophy is not a super tangible thing. In the Kresge core course, a lot of the social issues that we try and tackle in that course, they're much less tangible than learning: this is this math formula; this is this piece of history; this is how these things in government work; these are how these economic processes work. They're much more socially focused. And it was weird to take a humanities course for my first time. It was good, though. It was really good.

At the time, Kresge was experimenting with a type of Honors program along with Cowell and Crown. They had this program they were trying to form, called the first year Honors program. And the way that it had been done the year prior was based on your high school GPA, they would pre-select you for this program and you would take a different core course than the rest of your cohort, so that you would all sort of be together and know each other and have this community of honor students who can all make study groups and support each other and such.

But the provost in Kresge at the time thought (and I agreed) that the idea of being selected based on your high school GPA was a little strange. Because different varying standards based on high schools and such can lead to different numbers, even for students who are very engaged. And your high school GPA really doesn't determine how well you're going to do here, right? There are lots of stories about people with hard family lives and stuff who do terrible in high school, and then as soon as they can move out of that and be independent on their own, excel in college because they finally don't have all these problems that are weighing them down. Additionally, a lot of people get bored in high school, because a lot of people see it as not the utmost educational place on earth. More akin to a daycare, sometimes. '

So Kresge was experimenting with this. And what they did is they selected half of their first-year Honors program students based on their high school GPA. And the other half were based on core professor recommendations. I think there were about twenty of us in the program. So about ten of us got just recommendations to the provost from our core professor. I was actually one of those. It was really cool. And so, that program consisted of—your winter quarter, you were taking one of three Honors classes. They had *The Rise of Capitalism and its Consequences*, which is a sociology class that dealt with a lot of the historical standpoint of where capitalism arose, and then a lot of Marx's response to capitalism, and where these two were at in conjunction with each other, juxtaposition to each other. There was a virology class for the biologically minded people. And then for the language-minded people, there was a class on lost languages, where they were talking about Yiddish. And the whole set of students, probably

fifty or sixty or so of us, were kind of separated out into these three different classes. So, I didn't know anybody in the language class or the virology class, just that there are other students out there.

The capitalism class is really interesting. If you want to take a class that is very much so stereotypically UCSC, take a class literally talking about why capitalism exists and why the communist/socialist response to capitalism came about. A lot of those arguments. I think it was only offered once. I think after that it sort of disappeared into the ether, never to be taught again. I see that professor around once in a while still. She's in the sociology department. Yeah. That was quite an experience, you know, hearing a lot about UCSC's stereotypes and stuff, and then being fully thrust into, "All right, we're talking about how to dismantle capitalism now and all the problems with capitalism," and this and that and the other. That was fun.

Triple Majors:

Computer Science, Mathematics, and Network and Digital Technology

Vanderscoff: So you're starting to get these sort of UCSC experiences in your education—that's ongoing. Now, of course, you're in the interesting position that in terms of your academics, you've actually developed a triple major. And so you've given us a little bit of your educational foundation here at UCSC. I'm wondering whether you could start walking us through some of your majors, how you got involved in them, what interests they're sort of expressing.

Eadler: Right. So, freshman year, I come into the school. I was proposed computer science. I knew that I liked math a lot. I also really liked tinkering with electronics, to the small degree that I had done so, which is pretty minor. I came in and I looked at all the different courses, and all the different plans, and all the different departments. I really looked at it. And I said, okay, do I want to do the computer science major, or do I want to do the math major? And I was like, maybe I'll do a computer science major and a math minor, or vice versa. And then I looked at it

and I realized it's really not that much additional work to do the double major. Because there really aren't that many upper-division classes for a lot of majors, computer science and math being two of them. There are eight or so upper division classes you have to take and then once you've taken those, you have the degree. So, you can finish those in less than a year or so.

So, I started asking myself well, what if I did a double major and a minor in electrical engineering? Because I really like the idea of tinkering with electronics and stuff like that. So that was my plan kind of throughout freshman year. I was going to do that. And at some point, I realized that with all these sciency classes over here, these fulfil a bunch of the GEs you already have to take, You're knocking out your science; you're knocking out your statistics; you're knocking out your math. You're knocking out your textual analysis class, kind of surprisingly, actually. And the ones that are left behind are pretty easily filled by a lot of the humanities courses. So, with having taken that class in the winter of my freshman year, I was starting to think it would be really interesting to experiment with taking a sociology minor and trying to knock out the interpreting arts and media GE, the cross-cultural analysis GE, the ethnicity and race GE. Because they all fit in the sociology department. And you take five classes, upper division classes in the sociology department, and a couple of lower divs, and you have a minor to add to your transcript. So, I was thinking I might as well concentrate all of these things sort of in one place.

So, for a while I was kind of doing this double major/double minor thing, which sounds really impressive on paper. When you break it down, it makes sense. And it's definitely ambitious, for sure. People look at me like, "I could never do that! How do you ever?" I'm like "Really, it's just a matter of taking it one class at a time, one year at a time, and getting through it."

And at some point, late freshman year, early sophomore year, I realized that with the way it was set up at the time, if you're doing the computer science major and the electrical engineering minor, you actually end up just taking all of the classes and having enough extra units just lying

around from all these classes you're taking to get a completely free computer engineering minor. So, at that point I was doing a double major/triple minor. When I looked at it—and I have spreadsheets upon spreadsheets and flow charts at this point—thinking okay, like this is my attack plan. These are how I'm going to lay these classes out; these are when they're offered. To the point where I would go into advising and they'd be like, "Oh, have you ever made a four-year plan?" I'd pull out my laptop. "Here. Let me show you my elaborate five-year plan."

Vanderscoff: So you figured five years, though, in order to accomplish—

Eadler: Oh, I came into this university knowing that I wanted to spend five years here. I absolutely knew that I absolutely love learning and I'm going to maximize my time here in terms of what I want to accomplish educationally. I absolutely knew that I wanted to spend five years here if my situation allowed for it financially and otherwise. And it ended up that it was totally a possibility for me, which I'm extremely grateful for. Very, very thankful that it ended up working out.

And then, with the double major/triple minor, with these two minors, it seems kind of weird to have two minors, which is fifty upper-division units, minimum, to get these things. It seemed kind of weird. Because a major is only usually about forty units of upper-division work. So, I was looking at the computer engineering major, and I realized there's an interesting subset of the computer engineering major called network and digital technology, which is basically an electrical engineering minor and a computer engineering minor put together. You swap around one or two classes and you have a major instead of two minors. The equation there is if you have a computer science major and an electrical engineering minor, you basically have a computer science major and a network and digital technology major. So, you might as well do both. And that's how the triple major happened. It really isn't a whole lot more work than a double major and a minor. Or actually just the double major, because the minor is overlapping with the general ed requirements. So, yeah, that's how that came about.

I feel like there was another part to the question that you wanted?

Vanderscoff: Well, so for the record, you're majoring in math, computer science, network and digital technology. And then you're minoring in—

Eadler: STEM education. And so, the switch from sociology to education happened largely just due to the fact that one of the other things that I was doing at Rocketown senior year was math tutoring. I actually got involved there because my aunt, my second full summer with them, at the beginning of the summer she said, "Okay, you're not just going to sit around playing video games all summer like you did last year." I said, "Oh, why not?" (laughs) So she said, "You have to either get a job or go volunteer somewhere."

So, I ended up going down to Rocketown, because I had just gone to a concert there for the first time and I knew they were more than the music venue. And I realized, on their website that they have tutoring services that they try and offer. Lo and behold, they hadn't actually offered tutoring in a long time but they were really excited about having a tutor come in who wanted to volunteer to teach math.

So, I go in and it's middle of June or something like that, early June. And you know, come to find out, kids don't really want to learn math in the middle of the summer. (laughs) So I actually ended up not tutoring math for the summer. But when fall came around, I was doing that. And I did that all throughout senior year, also, while also volunteering at the music venue portion and hanging out a lot there.

So, I knew that I was always interested in education but hadn't really looked into the education minor yet. And as soon as I looked into it—there's the possibility to fulfill all the same general ed requirements. I wasn't really sure freshman year exactly where I was at, what I wanted to learn. I realized that education definitely is something that I'm a little more interested in than sociology. I really like sociology, still, and I kind of wish that I had more time to dedicate to

learning that as well. But unfortunately, there's a scarcity of time and mental capabilities and stuff. So that's how I ended up getting into the STEM education minor.

Vanderscoff: So balancing all this then, what sort of a unit load are you looking at in a particular quarter?

Eadler: Usually about twenty. The most I ever took in one quarter was twenty-eight, and that was at the end of freshman year. I was taking Computer Science 12B, which is *Data Structures,* Computer Engineering 16, which is *Discrete Math*, Math 24, which is *Differential Equations*. There was one other computer class. I don't quite remember what it was. I was taking a two-unit class associated with the first-years Honors program. It was a research colloquium, where people would come in and talk about their research and what they were doing. Oh, I was taking Computer Engineering 12, which is a lot of different things. It's sort of an intro to a lot of computer engineering subjects. And I think that's the twenty-eight units. Or is that twenty? I think it's twenty-three. There's one more class in there somewhere. It's on a spreadsheet somewhere. (laughs) But, yeah. I've taken up to twenty-eight before. Generally, I take about twenty units.

There was one quarter, I think, where I withdrew from a class and I dropped down to twelve, just due to a lot of stress going on. But usually, twenty or so is pretty average for me.

Vanderscoff: So then, so we're talking about a pretty significant spread, as far as going across three majors and a minor. 'But what I'd ask you to comment on is where you're sensing areas of intersection, and then how that relates to classes or projects or accomplishments that you're particularly glad to have been a part of.

Eadler: Yeah. So, I really have always thought that it would be really cool to work on computer science projects that specifically help teach math. So, things like Khan Academy, I've always thought are tremendously amazing. You're able to affect an extremely wide audience with a

relatively small resource load. It's not very intensive to stream a bunch of data to somebody's computer across the globe on a massive scale. At least these days, it's not so bad.

There's another company called Desmos. And being that I'm an education minor, I've been in some classrooms now where we've actually used Desmos in the classroom. It's essentially an online graphing calculator utility. If you Google "graphing calculator," it's the first thing that pops up now. I actually had this idea in a notebook somewhere. Like, it would be really cool if there were a graphing calculator website that worked like this and had these features. And then I magically find, oh, this already exists. And it feels like they took it straight out of my brain and put it onto some code. And so, I've actually applied to work with them. They never ended up getting back to my email. But maybe sometime in the future they'll see it.

But as to some of the projects that I've worked on here, in the Computer Science Department especially, I've had the chance to work on some things like this. When I took one of the senior design classes in the Computer Science Department, I worked on a project called Algabreezy, which—it had a lot of goals. And come to find out in a six, seven-week project, when you're trying to merge five different people's ideas on one project, a lot of them just end up not coming through. But originally, I was trying to take mathematical equations and make them easier to manipulate sort of by restricting someone to the only valid operations. I frequently find, personally, in doing a long algebraic manipulation, that if you drop a sine somewhere, if you forget a negative or something like that, it becomes really hard to trace back where your error was. It takes a long time to figure out where you went wrong. So, Algabreezy was meant to be a way to aid algebraic manipulation by helping you go from one step to the other, to the other via whatever a valid step at that point would be. That was really cool project. Again, it was a little over-ambitious, really, because I wanted to add a whole bunch of features here and there. And kind of come to find out that my teammates had a lot on their plates as well. And the five of us really, we just weren't able to put in nearly as much work as we wanted to into it.

I worked on another one called Canvas Share. Basically, I was realizing there really isn't a good platform (at the time) for just having a digital whiteboard interface between two people, right? Because it's really helpful when you're teaching math. My friends would ask me math questions on Facebook and things like that. And it's really hard to get complicated math ideas across in Facebook chat of all things, right? Skyping is another possibility where you have voice and some hand motions and stuff. Right? But it's really hard to have a good interface between them. So, my idea was, I'll just take a shot at trying to make an application like this. This is in the web design course. That was another thing that I did, specifically had integration with trying to add math formulas into the whiteboard interface. Come to find out my implementation—I'd only known how to program websites from this class for maybe two months at the time we were making the website. It really wasn't that great of a project. Two years later now, there's a lot of things I would have changed about that project. But nevertheless, it was a good experience.

And you know, I can't even think of all the other projects that I've done that try to convey a mathematical point to somebody via computer science? So, it's really how everything sort of ties together there. I enjoy it a lot. I really hope that I'm able to make a career out of it in the future. Working at companies like the ones that I mentioned earlier would be great. Or who knows what else is out there? It's the Bay Area. Basically, every tech thing is sort of in a fifty-mile radius around here.

Kresge Parliament

Vanderscoff: That's great. And we'll revisit that at the very end of the interview, talking about where you're at now and what you see going ahead. But before we circle back around that, I wanted to talk a lot more about some of the other areas of involvement that you've highlighted here at UCSC. Perhaps we could start out actually just by talking about the Kresge Parliament, which you've chaired, as well as been a member of.

Eadler: Yeah. From the first time that I went to Kresge Parliament, I could definitely tell that it's a space that's really interested with trying to improve the Kresge community. So, some of the things that we've done—during freshman and sophomore year, we had this project. We were trying to get a swing set put in Kresge, as just sort of an interesting little kind of Kresge-ish tidbit. We actually got pretty far in the project. We looked up some pricing stuff and we made a pitch to Risk Management and stuff like that. And we ended up—Risk Management comes and tells us, "Well, there's a problem with it. It's not handicap accessible."

And we're like, "Okay, but what handicapped person is realistically going to want to use a swing set?" (laughs) So we were a little—like I understand, there's a lot of laws in place that make a lot of sense. But at the same time, we were a little dismayed, just because Kresge is so handicapped inaccessible as it is right now—

Vanderscoff: In general.

Eadler: In general. You know, that this wasn't going to be a possibility for us. We were a little mad about that, because we put a lot of work into that project. And realistically, nothing came out of it.

Vanderscoff: So it was denied on accessibility grounds.

Eadler: Yeah, yeah. Which is a general theme of Kresge, kind of unfortunate.

Vanderscoff: Wait, you mean the issue of—

Eadler: Inaccessibility.

Vanderscoff: So how does that come up in terms of parliament, or in terms of Kresge life? Is that a theme that you've seen crop up time and time again?

Eadler: Yeah. So, I have a friend, well, she was not a resident of Kresge at the time. She ended up actually getting a physical injury. And because of the physical injury, she ended up deciding just to take the quarter off. 'Because just in general, Kresge especially, but a lot of campus is really inaccessible to disabled people. Unfortunately, there's not a whole lot Kregse Parliament can really do about that.

The real solution is that we kind of need to tear down Kresge and build it up again. Which is a project that's happening. We're in talks right now with different people about what the future of Kresge is going to look like. It's kind of a hot mess at the moment. But it is in the plans that in the next three, four, five years, Kresge will be completely renovated. And we're honestly, as students right now, a little scared about what that's going to look like because we haven't felt like a lot of the people making decisions have really asked us what we want it to look like, despite our best efforts of trying to tell them to please include us. We're not really sure exactly where the miscommunication and the disconnect there is. But regardless, that is actually one area where—everybody realizes Kresge is kind of an ADA nightmare. There are apartments on the ground floor that have like a four or five-step gradient to get up. I guess it makes sense from a standpoint of trying to get it off the ground and have a level surface and what not. But at the same time, you've kind of got to ask yourself, why, Kresge? (laughs)

Vanderscoff: Well, right. Even like the acid steps—

Eadler: Yeah, exactly, exactly. There's reasons for all these things. But their reason for existing is long gone and it's kind of time for, I think, things to be renovated, at least. We're hoping that the spirit of Kresge continues on and it looks fairly similar to the current design.

Vanderscoff: So if you see there's some potential positives in this big remodel, renovation that's happening at Kresge, what are your concerns about what might be lost if the students aren't listened to?

Eadler: Well, the apartment-style living is certainly a really interesting thing that is very unique to Kresge. No other freshman on campus, in large, are able to live in apartments. Of course, some like to live off campus and they'll get an apartment. And in certain strange scenarios, maybe somebody already has a friend who's living here and they can somehow work it out with the housing office. But these cases are fairly isolated.

But Kresge—all of their freshmen move into an apartment directly. It creates a really interesting space up there, where you get a lot of very unique identities that are able to come about. Because people have access to their own kitchen, people are able to make interesting very, very cohesive friend groups and social groups, due to being in an apartment with all them. Like I mentioned earlier, six out of my eight housemates after freshman year all moved off campus together as one unit. And they were mostly together—they had problems with one of the members and he ended up moving away. But I think five of them ended up spending the next three years together. This is the type of thing that is allowed to come about at Kresge. And everybody else would come over to our apartment because we suddenly have a hosting space where we can host people over. People who live in Porter, who live in dorms—they're not able to bring friends over to watch a movie or something like that. In Kresge, you're able to do these things. And it feels much more like a home, rather than a dorm room. That's one of the things that we're all very concerned about losing at Kresge.

As to whether or not I think every freshman should be in an apartment, I don't know that we need that. There's definitely been studies and such done, that we've been quoted, from the contractors who say dorm lives are better overall for freshman and yada, yada, yada. But I think there's something to be said for just the diversity of what's available. Some students don't want to live in apartments, for sure. And there are definitely students who don't want to live in dorms. I think the fact that Kresge has these spaces available right now allows for an interesting diversity in what's available for students. And we've seen some really good friend groups being spawned out of Kresge that last for a long time.

Vanderscoff: So then cycling back to the parliament—and we can actually probably deal with this as a topic that's overlapping with several of your areas and involvements—so parliament; then your work with the programs office, for example— but if you could share either particular issues that have come before the parliament, or particular programs that you'd like to talk about, by way of highlighting both your time at Kresge and then what some of the key issues or topics have been in your time there.

Eadler: Yeah, so Kresge Parliament, by and large, tries to keep its focus on community improvement. And really, more on the improvement side, rather than the tackling an issue side. I can't really think of many issues that have come to Kresge Parliament. Well, one issue is our writing center, the study center in Kresge. It was very rundown. The lighting situation in there wasn't very conducive to getting good studying done. The tables in there were pretty dilapidated. And so, one of our parliamentarian's projects my sophomore year was to talk to the college administrative officer about what improvements can be made there. So, we ended up going into the space with them, as a small subset of parliamentarians, and we looked at the space and we asked, "Okay, what things do we think this area can use?" Ended up printing out a survey for people who use the space often that also contributed some feedback. Came up with some real solutions. And then, over the following summer, we, I think, dipped into the Carry Forward Fund and we got some new tables, some new lights, some new couches, all for that space. And it really, really made a great improvement in that space and people's ability to study in there. 'Formerly, I didn't see a whole lot of people going in there. And then after we made the renovations, the following year it was much more heavily used. It was great.

Some of the things that the parliament has done for the community—we just got a book bin put up. We all like the idea of being able to share books and other material and whatnot. The Kresge Food Coop already has a free bin kind of outside. But it's not protected from the weather. You'll see things on there, but it's just a bookshelf that's been placed outside. So, we ended up saying, "You know, this is a really good idea. We'd like to do something similar, but for books, right?

Since UCSC is prone to having very foggy nights, as we have outside right now, very rainy and such, we needed to get something that had glass doors on it. We ended up looking at different options and talking to different people about the different needs and different ways to acquire the book bin that would be possible. Ended up getting a pretty nice bookshelf with closing glass doors and it's got a little insulation around it. So, this is what parliament tries to do. We try to think about what the community needs and things that it can do.

Another issue that we tried to solve—I don't know when the last time you've been to Kresge was.

Vanderscoff: A few years now, actually. I haven't been on this latest trip yet, no.

Eadler: So in Kresge, behind Building Eight, there's a pathway. There's not meant to be a pathway back there. It's absolutely not meant to be there. But for whatever reason, it came about. People started using it. And whether or not the campus likes it, people take this pathway. And there was a tree stump back there that was sort of impeding people. And so, the campus said, "Okay, people are taking this path whether we like it or not, so we should probably remove the tree stump." And it was dark back there and there's no light back there. But again, people are using it whether the campus likes it or not. So, the administration decided, "All right, we should probably get a floodlight back there." And these are things that came up in parliament. We tried to connect students to the administration to let them know that these are the problems that are here. I'm trying to think about what else the parliament has done in my time there.

There were a whole bunch of benches out in the little meadow area, sort of enclosed by all the buildings there. Sort of as a, what can we do to increase people's outsideness in Kresge that isn't a swing set, we came across, "Okay, what if we just got some nice benches and put those out in that area where we wanted the swing set to be?" So, we ended up getting five or six different benches and we put them out there. We see people on them all the time out reading books, and

out calling their parents and whatnot. You know, we're really happy to see the things that the parliament does actually ends up helping the student body in these ways.

Vanderscoff: So one way of thinking about what you all do with the parliament is maybe thinking of your constituency a little bit. So, you mentioned that you felt that the clichés that you heard about each of the colleges on Yahoo Answers when you were trying to figure out what was going on with these colleges in the first place, that they were more or less true. This is also a way for you to reflect on your own social experience of immersing in Kresge. But in your experience, what has it been that distinguishes Kresge as a college, or as a community, in your time here?

Eadler: So, to boil it down, the question is what distinguishes Kresge from other communities?

Vanderscoff: In your time here, yeah.

Eadler: I mean, the apartment style living is a big part of it. It's very centered around this idea that the social experience at Kresge is having the ability to have a friends' apartment. And you too can just sort of go back and forth between your apartments. Similar to a dorm room, but you're getting to know everybody in the apartment and all the other friends. And you're getting this really interesting mix of socializing. Similar to how lounges work in dorms and stuff. But lounges are just a little different. Because it's not really that group of people's space, specifically, right? Like, your living room is very different than a college lounge.

Vanderscoff: Well, and the lounges are increasingly being taken away, given the housing situation.

Eadler: (sighs) Yeah, yeah, exactly. I wouldn't be surprised if Kresge starts trying to shove people into the living rooms. No, actually that *would* really surprise me. I think Kresge has a very different social attitude to it, that's much more focused on trying to create a community rather than, how do I want to say it? [pause] There's something a little kind of superficial, in a

sense, about living in dorms, at least that I've experienced personally. Because I lived in the Kresge K Building, which is by no means anything like the rest of Kresge. From what I've heard, Kresge acquired the K Building by asking Porter for the buildings. It's housing that's built between Porter and Kresge. Porter has the A and B buildings, and then you go north and there's the D, E, F, G, H buildings, and then there's the I lounge and then the J and K buildings. And the J and K buildings originally, I believe, were allocated to Porter. Then some interesting things happened with Kresge in terms of Redwood Grove, across the ravine, where I've heard the university wanted that to be housing for all students, not just Kresge students. So Kresge now has this lack of available housing for their upper classmen, so they asked Porter for the J and K buildings.

When they made the J and K buildings, they definitely messed up in terms of not having college lounges. I've talked to several different administrators in Kresge now and a lot of them agree. Not having lounges in the building is a major detriment to them. I lived in the K Building in my junior year and there's *no* ability to socialize with people in the building. I did not know most of my neighbors. The only neighbors I knew, I knew before going into the building. So, I kind of had a little bit of a dorm experience, in that sense. Because they are three-people units; you still have a living room and you have a kitchenette type thing. But it's not really an apartment. It felt much closer to a dorm, especially because I had a roommate that year who was quite messy and it just made me never want to use the kitchen. So, I had a much more dorm-like experience, where I was basically using the bedroom just to sleep, or tried to be out of it as much as possible otherwise.

But yeah, so the apartment-style living in Kresge really allows people to create the sense of community in Kresge, and this sense of a wider community, rather than just these localized, you know—I'm in my dorm room, I have my friends here who come over and stuff. I can't tell you how many more people I met freshman year because of the apartment-style living and all the people who were coming out of the apartment constantly, than I did in the year after that. '

Vanderscoff: So have you been living on campus all five years, then?

Eadler: I lived on campus for three years. My first year was in Kresge. My second year was in Redwood Grove. And my third year was in the K Building. Then I moved off campus. And I'm currently pretty close to downtown.

Vanderscoff: Okay. So that's something maybe we'll, we're at an hour and a half, just for a time check. I don't want to hold you too terribly long.

Eadler: No worries.

Vanderscoff: Anyway, so we've spoken some about Kresge. You were in the students' program as an assistant, as an OL. You were in the Programs Office. Is there anything that you'd briefly like to say about that before we turn to talking about some of your campus-wide—

Eadler: Yeah. You know, being an orientation leader for four years, it's really interesting to see—[first] to experience moving onto campus for the first time and being a resident of the space and having all these services provided for you, to you, and having people move you in and make friends and stuff your first week and whatnot, and all throughout the rest of the school year. Then being on the other side of that and being able to help provide these services and come up with these ideas for events to do and stuff—that's been a really good experience. I think that social experience is underrated, but it's extremely important. Sometimes on its face it seems like they maybe don't do a lot, but I think it's one of those things where, if it were to disappear—it wouldn't be, I don't know if we'd be able to put our finger on it, but you'd definitely feel the difference.

So, events like the night hike—I met some of my friends who I still have to this day at that night hike. And that's the second day, usually. Yeah, the second or third day that the students have move in we go on the night hike. I think it's really important, in terms of things that I would love to see still exist in ten, twenty, thirty years. Having that sense of acclimation to the college

in the first week or so is really important. And then just seeing it continue all throughout the year, in terms of what the Kresge Programs Office does in terms of providing events, and what the RAs do in terms of providing events. I've heard a lot of people say that it doesn't seem like a lot's going on. But people aren't looking at everything that's going on because there's a lot of stuff going on all the time.

Vanderscoff: So then expanding our scope to campuswide, you have a couple of key areas of involvement that I want to be sure that we talk about. So, one of those is the SUA.

Eadler: I wouldn't know that I would call that key. I spent about a quarter in SUA. And then I promptly dropped that, mostly for the reason that, as opposed to Kresge Parliament and how I've heard a lot of the other senates operate—SUA is definitely the space where issues are tackled, where people will say, "We would like to make a resolution to say that the campus stands for this." Right? It's a really interesting space because you have a lot of different people from a lot of different mindsets who all get together and you just end up arguing at the end of the day about: do we think we should do this, or do we think we should not do this thing?

Vanderscoff: In your time there, such as?

Eadler: In my time, I just remember there was a resolution to divest from five companies that were furthering the occupation of Palestinian people, one of them being Raytheon Missiles, and one of them being Caterpillar equipment. And apparently these are very heavily Israeli-supported companies and they end up doing terrible things to the Palestinian people.

And let me just say, first of all, I am 100 percent totally okay with taking money away from a missile company. Regardless of whatever the politics behind that are, that just sounds like a good idea to me, personally. But you know, it was a really big, long debate. Granted, this was an important debate to be having, but also thinking about the scope of what this means, right? This is a collection of hodgepodge students at a university who are basically writing a kind

letter to the Regents to tell them what to do with their money, right? In a lot of senses, I think it's important that we're engaging with these ideas and bringing up these points and thinking about what it means for us to take these stances on these issues. But at another point, the extent to which people invest themselves in these problems—it's not healthy, I don't think. Because at the end of the day, it kind of felt like a lot of these resolutions and other issues we were talking about, we weren't seeing effects for them on campus, right? And a lot of them, they aren't totally tangible. I understand the importance of having the student body say these things, but it's also not terribly representative of how the whole student body feels. Of course, the SUA, technically you've got representatives from each of the ten colleges. And all of those are elected by the members of those bodies and those represent the voices. But realistically, I don't know how much weight every person's word carries with them that reflects the whole student body. Because I don't know that it's truly a good representation of how the body feels.

And so, I started realizing these things, and I started realizing this is not a healthy space for me to be in because I kind of just end up getting angry at the fact that we're sitting here til like two in the morning, talking about these things, and people keep on rehashing the same arguments on each side. And we keep on re-voting and re-voting and it keeps on ending up the same way. And it's, you know, it kind of feels like in a lot of these spaces, nothing really ever gets done. And, of course, one of the problems with that is this happens, students get burned out, and then they leave the space after a year or two. New people come in; they haven't experienced these problems. They don't understand why you may want to calm down a little bit and try to come to a less—people get very aggressive in the space. People don't understand why you might want to try and calm down and come to a more settled agreement about some of these things. It's a very different space and I did not really want to involve myself in that much longer.

Slugs United by Math

Vanderscoff: So you have that experience with campus-wide governance. But you've had other areas of campus-wide involvement, one of them being Slugs United by Mathematics. So, this is an opportunity for you to bridge some of your areas of involvement, and then with some of your academic work. '

Eadler: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: So if you could just please talk a little bit about that organization and your place in it.

Eadler: So Slugs United by Math is really interesting. To a large degree, when I came into this university, there was no outlet for a social component for math majors. The department really doesn't do a whole lot to support math majors getting together and doing fun things. There's an undergraduate colloquium that started up and that helps a little bit to get people. But who really wants to go learn math outside of class sometimes, right? Like you're in class for what, like twelve hours a week or whatever and you're doing homework for another twenty or so. Kind of the last thing a lot of people want to do is go hear a math talk about something they're not really that familiar with.

So, my junior year, some really cool people in the Math Department at the time who were very involved in their own little cohort, decided, "You know, we should make a math club. We should do this." And as soon as I heard about this, I was all in. I ended up going to every meeting that I could make, hanging out with them as much as I could. For a while, I was the events coordinator for them; I think for a time I was vice chair. I don't remember. I've been in so many different positions in so many different things. I want to say I was vice chair last year. And this year I was uninvolved in the fall because I was busy taking a really heavy course load, got more involved again in winter. And now I'm the events coordinator again this quarter.

It's a really interesting thing to make a space specifically for socializing within the department. When you're in class, as soon as the lecture's over, you're getting kicked out by the next class to come in. You can't just hang out with people after class and talk about the class. You may even have another class directly afterward or something like that. And it's hard to get to know people in the Math Department, especially, because it's not a subject that really lends itself to conversation. It's a subject that lends itself to looking at a whole bunch of different formulas and theorems and really trying to internalize to yourself and prove to yourself why these things are true.

There is a social component in studying with that, and trying to help friends learn things. But a lot of it is a very personal endeavor. So, to have the society come about in my time here, to see it going from just meeting downstairs in a room, people just sort of getting together and doing stuff, to coming up with a constitution and getting it passed through SOAR, and starting to do some of our first fundraisers—

We started doing this traditional fundraiser. On March 14th or Pi Day, we will host a fundraiser where we get a whole bunch of circular goods—pie, cookies, pizza and donuts and stuff like that, all sorts of circular foods. And if you buy a baked good, you get to vote for someone to get pied in the face. And so, at 3:14 on March 14th, we have a professor come in, and we get a whole bunch of whipped cream, put it in a pie tin, and just smash it in somebody's face up on Science Hill. It's a lot of fun. It's a pretty cool tradition. We like it a lot. Always gets a pretty good crowd out there. It's really interesting to see these things come about and start to gain some momentum carrying forward. The first year it happened, it was definitely really hard because a lot of the people involved in the club had never been involved in making a fundraiser before and advertising and whatnot. Now we have documents that say this is what we did last year, this is how you do things, this is how you do these things. And it got a little easier to carry along. '

So, it's cool to see the club evolving, becoming a little more stable, a little more steady in what it does, and hopefully something that will be able to carry on with us for however long people want it to exist.

Smith Renaissance Society

Vanderscoff: That's great. And so, then another area of community and resources, something that existed prior to your time here but I wanted to be sure we spent at least a little bit of time talking about, is the Smith Renaissance Society.

Eadler: Right.

Vanderscoff: So I guess my first question to you would be how did you learn about this organization and then what sort of a resource has it been for you?

Eadler: So, the summer before I came here, I was looking at the university. And, of course, as a freshman you're very worried about how am I going to pay for this thing? Because you're not fully versed in how financial aid works and stuff like that. A lot of different details there. So, I remember scouring, especially as an out-of-state student who's paying twenty-three thousand dollars more in tuition than all the other students, scouring the school's website for all sorts of different scholarships and opportunities and stuff like that. And ended up coming across the Smith Society. They are a society for former foster youth, former students with strange family backgrounds in general, orphans, people who've been disowned by their parents, stuff like that. Really anyone who has less than full family support behind them, traditional family support.

I sent them an email the summer before I came. And I was like, "Hi, you all sound amazing. I really like the fact that you all exist. How do I join? How do I get involved in this?" And definitely a little enthusiastic behind it. And I got an email back saying, "Normally we'll send out an email to all students who are eligible and whatnot a couple of weeks before the school

year starts. There's a welcome dinner and all these things." To which I very quickly RSVP'd for the dinner and stuff, and got involved.

They're really, really good at what they do. They specifically are looking for students who, again, have troubled homes, who don't have full family support behind them. A lot of students who are just out on their own, trying to make it through life by themselves. And what they're able to do—they find these students and they're able to provide very vital, very necessary resources for these people to complete their studies here in a reasonable amount of time. That comes in the form of trying to scour the community for resources like housing, for connecting people with other opportunities on campus, internships and stuff, that are interested. They do a lot of work down at the Walnut Avenue Women's Center and a couple other community centers and stuff like that. And if you're having problems with this or that, a lot of people here are very well-connected and they'll say, "Oh, I know the person you need to talk to about this issue. I'll put you in contact with them." And stuff like that.

And then also much more simple stuff, like how do I do my taxes? Things you'd normally ask your mom or dad, but a lot of us don't have moms or dads, so, they're trying to provide the family support that we're otherwise lacking, and in ways that they can't provide that support, trying to provide opportunities to make up for the lack of support that's there.

So as soon as I got involved with them freshman year, I went to pretty much every event that I could make. They have a weekly lunch that happens in the Cowell dining hall. I've tried to go to as many of those as I possibly can. Unfortunately, a lot of times, class and clubs and stuff provides a conflict, so it's not always possible. But they really try and make themselves available to everybody. It's kind of intangible, I think, a lot of the ways that they've helped me as a person here. You know, in just so many small ways, they're able to do what they do. I definitely don't think I'd be where I am today if it wasn't for the Smith Society—for sure. They were a large part in helping me get in-state tuition, California residency. And if it wasn't for

that, I wouldn't be sitting here today. If I didn't get in-state tuition, I would not have had a way to pay for school. I paid for my freshman year by exhausting what I had in my small savings account and then short of that, there's nothing left. So, it was either get in-state tuition or start applying elsewhere, somewhere I can afford. Or taking a gap year and getting a job. So, I'm really lucky to be here, for sure.

Vanderscoff: Because there wasn't any sort of financial aid mechanism to make up that shortfall.

Eadler: No. And it may have fallen under the categories of loans at that point. I'm not really sure how it works out. Because I know the university—if you can't make it, they'll try and supplement it with loans as much as possible. I'm really not sure exactly how it all works. But if I were to have gotten the same award I got freshman year, there's no way that I would have been able to pay for school. And even now, of course, I'm getting by by the skin of my teeth. But I'm here.

Vanderscoff: And so the Smith Society was a key part in terms of aiding you through that process of getting California residency.

Eadler: Yep. And helping me figure out like what paperwork to file, and how to do these things and all the other things across the board. My sister, as well, helped me with a lot of that, like getting an in-state driver's license, and how to register my car out here, getting California license plates. These are all things that the residency deputy likes to see you do to prove that you want to live in California after you graduate, trying to anchor yourself here more than elsewhere.

Vanderscoff: And then as far as the people who you're interacting with in the Smith Society, I know Bill Dickinson is quite involved with that. For the record, to what extent is that a campus-affiliated organization? To what extent is that someone like Bill, who's an alum?

Eadler: It's not terribly campus-affiliated. It's mostly a community of people existing as closely as they can to campus, providing the resource. The campus definitely likes the Smith Society, but I don't know that the campus is necessarily providing any funding for us. All the funding the Smith Society gets is raised by donors. The Smith Society sends out thank you cards and stuff like that, and they'll do calls to people who were formerly associated with the society, asking if they're able to make a donation. And we participate in Giving Day, which is a new fundraising thing that's going on on campus to try and encourage people to donate more. They have a day for it, and to a large degree, I believe that's been largely successful. I'm not really sure, but I've heard of a lot of different organizations being greatly benefited by Giving Day so far, Smith Society being one of them.

And definitely there have been some people throughout the time. There's Amy Hamill, who worked at STARS. When she worked at STARS, she would open up her office as much as she could to Smith students. And, of course, Smith students, a large majority of them, are students who have been STARS as well, STARS being the center for re-entering students and transfers and stuff like that. And a lot of Smith students are re-entering students and transfers. They tried to enter college for a while, or they entered at a community college nearby in their hometown, scraping by. And then decided, "I'm going to try to transfer to a UC." They get here, and they don't have these resources, so STARS tries to help them with that. So, there's a lot of overlap and it kind of made sense for the Smith Society to sort of find its home with STARS. Because you're able to share a lot of resources, and you kind of have a home base on campus. Amy Hammill has since retired. It's now with Sally Lester. She's still working at STARS.

So, it [Smith Renaissance]'s not a campus organization. It's a bunch of individuals who said, "When I was a kid, I wish I had this support. And now that I'm in the position where I can provide the support, I'm going to do what I can to do so."

Vanderscoff: So that actually leads us—unless there's anything further you'd like to say about the Smith Society—

Eadler: You know, there are probably things, but so many. (laughs) None of them necessarily rising to the top of the train of thought.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, and that's fine. Because you can always add them in in the editorial process if something comes to mind.

Eadler: Right, right.

Financial Struggles

Vanderscoff: So then, before we more it totally away here, one thing I did want to mention is the financial aspect, if there's anything further you'd like to say about this campus at a time when there have been tuition hikes, protests around tuition hikes? And then, just for you, what it's like in this day and age to manage the economic aspect of being a student.

Eadler: So it's very different for me than it is for a lot of students, right, because I am in a field where—number one, I like what I'm doing in computer science and math. I know a lot of computer science majors who don't really like what they do. And I kind of question, you know, is it really just for the money? And a lot of it is. I'm in a position currently where I know that I'm going to get a job in the tech industry, which is currently booming. I know that I'm going to be able to pay off my student loans very quickly afterwards. I don't know that my experience in dealing with finances is necessarily representative at all of most students' experiences here. But being that I'm an independent student, I am bearing my entire financial burden on myself. I don't have any family helping me out with it. That being said, I did have a savings account for me, waiting for me when I got to college.

But at the end of the day, I realize that the campus here is trying to make sure that you're going to make it through without having to worry too much about it. A lot of times that comes in the way of "we're going to meet you where—you're not going to be well off or anything like that, but you'll be able to get by at the end of the day. And what we can't match you with, scholarships and financial aid directly, we'll try and provide loans for you for now." And thankfully, loans here right now, going into the industry that I'm going into, they're very reasonable for me. I know some students who are on much higher loan programs than I am. They aren't making quite as much financial aid. And a lot of them aren't going into the tech industry and a lot of them aren't looking at such well-paying jobs as I am. So, I'm definitely extremely privileged.

So, I don't know where the campus is at, necessarily, with finances. Because I'm in a very different track than a lot of people, for sure. And I think, being that I'm independent, the campus is more likely to try and cover what I can't make with loans and financial aid, whereas someone who has two parents still, they rather expect that the parents will pitch in for it, whether they're able to or not. I know a lot of families who aren't.

But contrast this with people I knew senior year of high school who were going to school in Nashville. I had a friend who graduated from Belmont University and she said she came out of school with $150,000 - $180,000 in debt for a four-year education, basically bearing her entire education directly on loans, at a private school where tuition is fifty thousand a year. Thankfully my loans aren't nearly that high, either. That it's a public university where we're getting a lot of taxpayer input into the pool of how we're able to survive here, helps a lot. For sure. It's kind of daunting looking at how much people have to pay back, especially with average income for a job, college graduate, straight out of school. It's kind of daunting.

But I know that personally I'm going to be okay. I'm kind of interested now in seeing what I can do afterward, being someone who is in a very privileged standpoint of being in this industry,

trying to see how I can help people out. And how I can maybe even make changes to the system to make it more affordable again for those who are less privileged than myself.

Vanderscoff: You mean in terms of the education here at UCSC?

Eadler: Financially see what's possible, for sure.

National Politics

Vanderscoff: Great. And so, before I come to one or two very concluding questions that I have, to bring us into the present, you've been at this school for the past almost five years at a time of substantial domestic and global political change. And so, if there's anything in particular from the past that you might like to talk about, please introduce it. What I'd like to ask you directly about is the recent presidential election, your thoughts on that personally, and your sense of how this played out in some of the communities that you're involved with here on campus.

Eadler: Yeah. So, I've been lucky enough to be on campus for two presidential elections now, actually. I was here in fall 2012, when Obama got reelected. I remember that night pretty clearly. And I was here on campus the night that Trump won the election. And those are two very different nights being on this extremely liberal campus.

I was in Kresge when the election results came in for Obama's reelection. I remember there were a lot of people yelling out their windows, and a lot of cheering. People were extremely happy, and I remember sitting in a café with my mentor from the Smith Society talking about the election, sort of where people were at in terms of some of what Romney stands for and stuff, and just being like wow, this seems ridiculous. How can someone with these ideas—why do people have these ideas? I don't understand.

And yeah, fast forward four years later and we have Trump now. I was in lab for my robots class at the time. We were all checking the election coverage. Someone's in lab, talking about

this state's results just got in and this state's results just got in. And honestly, we were all pretty invested in it. But we're all also very invested in our little robots that we're making. It's the mechatronics class. It's traditionally thought of as one of the most work-intensive classes at the university. You build a fully autonomous robot that completes a challenge all on its own. You take your finger off the button and it goes and it does its thing all on its own.

Vanderscoff: I saw this on your Facebook. You have a video of this.

Eadler: Yeah, I sure do. Very proud of our little robot. But when you're in lab, you're in lab for that class for like sixty hours a week usually, if not maybe a little more sometimes, especially near deadlines. Going home at midnight, one a.m. very frequently, sometimes as late as two or three. If you're really struggling, really have to do some work, sometimes you'll pull a lot of all-nighters. You'll end up sleeping in the lab.

So, a lot of us are very delirious, right? And we're working on our code and stuff and our robots. And all of a sudden, we see the numbers come in. And we see Trump is unfortunately pretty far ahead of Hillary there. And all of a sudden, twenty or thirty minutes later, we just see this mob start to form outside. And they're coming through campus yelling, "Fuck Trump!" the whole way through. And you know, people are really angry about this. Because there's a lot of dialog that Trump tries to bring to the table that lends itself to empowering misogynistic, homophobic, xenophobic ideologies. It's a lot of stuff that I've experienced personally, growing up in Nashville with a lot of the racism. I remember, growing up in Nashville, there was legislation at one point to make all emergency services English-only, with the idea being that if we restrict the emergency services to English-only that will force all the Hispanic communities to learn English and assimilate better into our culture and whatnot. [angry tone] So a lot of these issues are unfortunately some that I'm kind of acquainted with, having grown up in Tennessee.

And as soon as he won the election that night, I was just starting to think, wow, it's very strange to think this could even be a possibility because everybody on campus was talking about either

Bernie, or there's a small set of Hillary people who originally wanted Hillary to win. No Trump supporter would ever talk about it, mostly because they know there's a lot of very opinionated liberals on this campus.

There were definitely a couple of cases of Republican people in the coming days being treated very differently about being open about their political views. I don't remember the exact scenario, but I do remember someone getting physically assaulted over it at some point.

Vanderscoff: At a place where you were at? Or you heard about this.

Eadler: It was somewhere on campus. Kind of a scary time. Even to this day, I think if anybody were to be out and about being pro-Trump on campus, they would face some pretty serious lashback for that.

So, I remember being in lab. It was cold. And just seeing this mob come up through campus. They were angry. They were angry—they were really angry. And I don't blame them.

Vanderscoff: And then, any thoughts on since then, where the campus climate is, like more up to this moment?

Eadler: You know, unfortunately I've been in a lot of really tough classes and I haven't been able to engage myself as socially as I previously have been. So, it's kind of hard to say what the differences have been. Being that this is my senior year, I've been taking a bunch of classes because it's kind of my last chance to do so for a while. Until grad school. I can only say that the campus is much more interested now in—professors that I've had are much more interested in trying to open up these dialogues.

I took a great class last quarter by the name of *Monsters*. It's in the Theater Department. It's taught by Professor Michael Chemers. He absolutely would never try to belittle anybody in his class for any of their beliefs or anything like that. But frequently, a lot of the subject material

happens to overlap with a lot of national dialogues that we're going through. Because a lot of theater is about taking marginalized people and trying to bring them into the spotlight as much as is socially acceptable at the time. Being that it's a theater class, we talked a lot about where theater played a role in the seventies and eighties with trying to get more recognition for gay people to be more widely accepted, issues like that. How theater plays with these things, and how a lot of what Trump's administration has said that they want to do, and their agendas and their goals, conflicts with a lot of that.

And so, professors I think now are much more interested in trying to evoke these conversations. And again, they absolutely—they don't want to create a conflict in the classroom. But they want people to engage with these ideas in meaningful ways, and really question themselves. I mean, I know personally there have been issues where I came into this school, not really thinking, not so sure on a lot of issues and stuff, especially related to trans issues and non-binary issues—not really knowing a whole lot about, and not really thinking anything about it. You know, you come to this university and it's a topic of very frequent conversation that people are interested in having you try to engage with—all sorts of alternative lifestyles that aren't represented traditionally that are marginalized in several communities. I know that I've changed personally from coming here. And I think what professors are trying to do now is really try and get people to think about where they're at and what they think is right. It's hard not to, of course, want to impose your political beliefs on people. No professor's going to say, "You'll be graded down if you don't agree with these things." But the best you can do is ask people to think about the issues.

Vanderscoff: Sure. And are you seeing this even in STEM classes, necessarily?

Eadler: Not quite as much. A lot of STEM professors—they don't really care so much about tackling issues like this. It's a lot harder to tie into the curriculum and make it relevant to the class. Though certainly, some of my professors have had some choice words on the subject, for

sure, whether they're related to the class or not. But I would say that instructionally the climate has changed in trying to create more of a conversation around some of the agenda items that the presidency is trying to bring to the table.

Vanderscoff: So you're seeing that structurally. And then you said that personally you've changed your opinion, or your feeling, about some issues like trans rights and that sort of thing.

Eadler: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: So as a way of reflecting on what it is that makes UCSC distinct one way or another, would you mind talking a little bit more about that?

Eadler: About where it is socially?

Vanderscoff: Yeah, but your own experience of growth or change.

Eadler: So by and large, we don't have a lot of trans people in Tennessee. At least, not any that are out and about, about their identity. The only time that I ever recall seeing a trans person before coming here—Nashville had a Nashville Pride once. It was a Pride festival. But it felt very inauthentic. I went and it was five dollars to get in. Which seemed strange to me to begin with, that you're trying to celebrate LGBT lifestyles and you're charging money to get into this festival. 'It did seem a little weird to me. And so, I'm hanging out on the outskirts, because I don't want to pay these people money. I don't know what this is going to. It feels like really weird to me. So, I'm hanging outside of the fence and I'm looking in. And I realize this is a bunch of different companies that have basically just paid to get their thing here. It seemed really money-driven. It was kind of weird. But there were definitely a lot of people there.

And outside of the fence, there was an Evangelical Christian group who's holding protest signs, saying, "Your way of life is totally wrong. And no matter what you've got going on in your head, your DNA is still the same." Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. A lot of the traditional arguments

that they like to throw out. And on the forefront of the fence—there actually is a physical fence between these people—there's a trans person who's basically trying to combat against them. I think it was one of the first times I'd ever seen a trans person in person in life. Before that it was all on TV, and the various stereotypes on like *Dr. Phil* and *Maury* and stuff like that. It's not necessarily the most representative example of seeing a trans person in real life.

And up until that point, it wasn't something that I had to engage with. Because by and large, it's not something that I had to really be aware of, and it's not something that really is so prevalent in Nashville. More so, now. And perhaps even more so after getting out of high school. Maybe it was there all along and I was so wrapped up in high school, I never saw any of it. Not that I ever had any problem with it or anything like that. It's just that I never understood a lot of the intricacies around it. I never understood a lot of the issues that they were facing and stuff. Because in my mind, what do I care, right? Like you're just like another person. Like, you're cool. If you want to talk about these things or those things, or you want to go get some food together, or whatever, it's never really an issue for me.

But, of course, that sort of mentality ignores the fact that these are people who've been discriminated against and they have a lot of experience with a lot of these issues. And it's something that I didn't really have a sensitivity for beforehand. But now, come in UCSC, I had a trans housemate last year. Actually, two, three trans housemates last year. One who had fully transitioned from female to male and two that were non-binary. And it's interesting now to look back and see—these are not conversations that are happening in high schools in Tennessee.

I *can* say, however, these are conversations that are now happening in California high schools. Surprisingly. Being that I'm an education minor, doing the STEM education, I've actually been an observer in several classrooms now. And they have, "This school supports our trans youth" and stuff like that, buttons and flags and fliers and stuff. It's a very different environment. And a lot of that, especially coming about after Trump's presidency, and especially Pence and his

comments about gay conversion therapy and such like that. Really trying to make sure that all these youth are very welcomed in these spaces.

But again, we didn't have an LGBT support center, or an LGBT club or anything like that in high school. I don't even know if I knew any gay people in high school. There probably were. I'm probably just not thinking of them right now. But yeah, in large part, it's just there's a lot of education that just isn't there in high school. Especially in Tennessee, of all places. Especially going to a fundamentalist Southern Baptist school, where you're told that these people are wrong for what they're doing and wrong for their lifestyle. Not that that's representative of all Christians. Of course, there are some very socially minded Christian sects out there. The school that I went to took a very condemning view on gay people and trans people and stuff like that. (sighs) It's upsetting.

Vanderscoff: Yes. It's an interesting opportunity to reflect on what is distinct about UCSC and the way in which education here can happen in many different ways, and a lot of it outside the classroom.

Finding Balance

So, just coming down to very final questions here, one thing is that you've talked about a lot of different involvements. You're talking about a situation where you're spending sixty hours a week in a class. Then you're also talking about all your college involvement. And of course, you're commuting back and forth from town. You're no longer living at Kresge.

Eadler: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: So what I've been asking everyone on this project is what are your practices of self-care to maintain some sort of balance and continue forward in your study?

Eadler: Yeah. Getting eight hours of sleep a night is really important. I've got to say, some of my self-care practices, especially like very recently, have sort of been having to be modified a little bit for reasons that I would like to not go on the transcript. Recently going through a bit of a housing change. I'm now sharing my room with one of my housemates. There's a small room change. And a lot of my self-care takes the form of getting eight hours of sleep a night, making sure that I'm eating. Making sure to spend at least a little bit of time with friends. It's hard sometimes to find time, especially when I tend to collect friends who are as busy as myself.

Self-care, it's hard. It's really hard. I frequently find that making to-do lists is really therapeutic for me. And putting out on paper: okay, I've got to do this homework by then, and I've got to do these things and I've got to do these things and these things. And even if I just take an old to-do list and I just transcribe all the items I haven't gotten around to off of that list, that can be very caring for myself. Frequently, cooking. I really like cooking. Being able to mindlessly sort of engage in chopping up vegetables and putting them in a pan or whatever for forty-five minutes or so, whatever, and just sort of being able to disengage with all of the work and all of the everything else that's going on—all the clubs, all that—that's been really important for me.

And unfortunately, I haven't really had time to cook lately. Self-care, specifically like these past two or three weeks, has been kind of hard. But a large part of it is trying to line up your ducks and get everything else in life in a place where you're in an environment that supports you. So, trying really hard to live with good people. Trying really hard to make sure that you've got food in the fridge, which unfortunately for a lot of people isn't necessarily such an easy possibility. We do have a lot of students here on campus who are on food stamps. Making sure in life that you're just really surrounded by good people as much as you can be, which can be hard. It's hard to find good people. But yeah, in terms of self-care, just trying put yourself in an environment where you're able to take care of your needs as much as possible.

Final Reflections

Vanderscoff: I think a lot of what we've been talking about today is finding certain resources or support centers that can support that. And that might be being involved with the Kresge community in the way that you've been, or it might be the Smith Renaissance, or it might be a couple of the other things. So, then a final question on my end—you've actually already spoken to this to some degree—but now that you're concluding your education here, what do you see next for you?

Eadler: So I'm currently in the process of talking with a company about getting employed. I went to one of the campus career fairs about two months ago. I dropped off a resume; they liked what they saw, asked for my transcripts. I went through a couple of interviews and they said, "We want to hire you." I'm currently waiting on the paperwork for that to come through.

Originally, what I wanted to do directly after school was grad school, in the realm of scientific computing or computational methods. It's kind of the intersection between math and computer science. It's about using computer science to solve math problems that are horrendous to solve by hand, if not impossible sometimes to solve with a nice, succinct formula. It takes a long time to really research what you want to do in grad school. It takes a lot of self-reflection to ask yourself is this something that I actually want to do? And with taking the robots class in the fall, and coming out of a really busy summer job where I was working for a summer camp company that ate up upwards of eighty hours a week of my time for basically minimum wage pay. Having like one week off between the two, looking into grad school programs was not really a possibility, unfortunately, this past cycle. Especially when it comes to studying for and taking the GRE and letters of recommendation and all that. And additionally, I think it's going to be good to take some time to reflect on my past five years here and think about the next step.

For a long time, like I said, I wanted to go to grad school directly afterward for a program like this, and then down the line, think about doing a PhD in math. So, the grad school directly after

would have been a master's. 'And I think now what I want to do is take a couple years off. Work in industry for a while. Figure out where I really want to place myself in the world and what I really want to do with it. And then come back to grad school with industry experience and say okay, I know how I want to apply myself here, I know where to hone my time, where to spend my time here at grad school, and really take on what I want to be taking on. And then use that to do something really good.

Vanderscoff: Great. Is there anything else that you'd like to say, in closing, by way of reflecting on what's been distinct about your UCSC education, or what it's done for you? Or if not, that's fine.

Eadler: I think in closing—you know, one thing that I've tried to think about in my time here is what is UCSC? What is the Santa Cruz identity? What is the Kresge identity? What is the math people identity? What is the computer science people identity? You know, we have sixteen thousand different undergraduates here, and one or two thousand graduate students, and a couple thousand faculty, and staff all throughout the campus. And the more that I try and decompose all these components of what makes one identity in one place, the more I realize that you can't. I think there are really sixteen thousand different stories going on for the undergraduates. There are sixteen thousand different conceptions of what UCSC means. And while there may be a couple of common themes that run between them, and Kresge being free and independent, there is no one identity on campus. It's really an interesting amalgamation of a whole bunch of different identities that all come together for this four years in this one place. And really, it's amazing with seeing clubs spring about, like math club while I'm here, and seeing other organizations in my time sort of fizzle out into not having people want to carry the project forward and stuff. It's interesting to see things evolve over time and really see that everything is temporary. And not only are we in an interesting time, but we're in an interesting juxtaposition of these twenty thousand people on this campus. And not only will this time not exist again, these moments won't exist again, but it's more than just this place, and it's more

than just this university, and it's more than just these buildings and these trees and these fields and stuff. It's really—I've been trying to think about what is the UCSC identity. And I think there's sixteen thousand, twenty thousand different UCSC identities.

It's something that I think about a lot. What does it mean to be a UCSC student? What does it mean to be here right now at this time? And I really think it's interesting that no one story do I think represents everybody's experience here. There's so many different facets to people's experience here that I don't think, unless we surveyed all twenty thousand people on campus every year on where they're at, I don't think we'd really get a full coverage of it. So as much as this interview has been my story and my place in this history, it's I think important for viewers and readers going forward to realize that my story is extremely different from a lot of other people's stories at this university, and to remember that a lot of stories are starkly different from mine, for a lot of different reasons. That's it.

Vanderscoff: Perfect. Well, on my end, I'd like to thank you so much for taking the time out to do this, for sharing all your thoughts, and for all the things you're doing here at UCSC.

Eadler: Cool. Thank you very much.

Vanderscoff: Great. With that, we'll close off this record.

Thomas Herz

At the time of his interview, Thomas (Tommy) Herz was a sophomore at Cowell College. He is a history major, with a minor in education. Tommy grew up in Pleasanton, in the East Bay of California. He and Cameron Vanderscoff (the interviewer) met while participating in the Gail Project with Professor Alan Christy in Okinawa, but Herz was nominated as an interviewee by Professor Christy, who is provost of Cowell College. Tommy also works as a leader with Welcome Week at Cowell College.

Vanderscoff: Today is Monday, October 23, 2017, and this is Cameron Vanderscoff here for the Student Interviews Project at the McHenry Library here at UC Santa Cruz. So, the way we've been starting this project is by asking folks to introduce themselves, identify themselves in whatever words they choose.

Herz: My name is Tommy—well, my real name is Thomas, but everybody calls me Tommy and Tom, unless it's in a professional setting, and then I go by Thomas. I'm a history major, education minor, second year at UC Santa Cruz, affiliated with Cowell College.

Vanderscoff: So, as you know, our main emphasis in this oral history is to talk about your time at UCSC, but we're curious about what you're bringing with you here to UC Santa Cruz. So please say a little bit about your background or your family, leading into some of your early educational experiences.

Early Life

Herz: Well, I was born in San Jose, October 1997. And we moved to Pleasanton, in the East Bay, about two weeks after I was born. So, I've lived in Pleasanton essentially my whole entire life, which is a very, very, very nice place. It's definitely suburban, and it was a great place to grow up. Not a whole lot happened there growing up, which is probably a good thing. But it also turned out to be sort of a bubble as well. Going from Pleasanton to Santa Cruz was definitely an eye-opening experience. [In] Pleasanton not a whole lot happens; coming here is definitely a completely different atmosphere and I've learned a lot about all sorts of types of people.

My parents are Adrienne and Larry. They're still married and everything. And my brothers, Patrick and Joey—Patrick is just about a year and a half younger than me and Joey is about four years younger than I am. We're a very, very tight knit family, very close. That's kind of the way it's been since I was born. And then I have extended family on my dad's side who live in San Jose. So out of the cousins, there're seven of us and we're also very, very close. Growing up, I was from a very tight-knit family, which I definitely appreciate as I look back, knowing that not a lot of other people had that. My mom's side lives in Pennsylvania, so it's a little bit farther, but everyone does a very good job of staying in touch, and we try and go back there and visit every two years.

Elementary school, I had about three friends, it was great. I was not a cool elementary school kid. I ran for VP back in the day; did not win. That's okay. I don't hold a grudge—that much. Fifth grade was a hard time. [laughs] And then middle school—I had the typical 7th grade experience: incredibly hormonal and a little wild. Then in 8th grade I kind of settled in. I made a few friends that I still have today and that's I think where I socially, really kind of did better. These friends, two of my best friends, Harriet and Shelby are still my best friends to this day. We all met in the same class in 7th grade and those two relationships I hold very, very close because we've been through so much together. Everybody goes through their own individual

stuff, but we always know that the other two are backing each other up. Throughout high school and now into college, I still hold on to those.

In the beginning, my parents tried to put me on a soccer team. Did not work. Then they tried T-ball; it was terrible. I just picked flowers the whole entire time. [Laughter] At soccer I scored one goal, and that was by accident. Someone kicked it at me and it hit me in the face or something like that. I can't remember. Then I joined swim, and that kind of became more of my thing. I joined when I was nine years old, on the Pleasanton Meadow Sharks, which was the neighborhood team at the pool right around the corner from my house. And in the beginning, I hated going to swim practice, but that's just a general swimmer thing. No swimmer likes going to swim practice. And I was always the slowest, which was fine. Well, yeah, I was the always the slowest, which I guess was something like, "Oh, that's a bummer." But as time went on, I kept going, slightly because my parents made me, but then I realized I really, really loved it. And I formed relationships with people on that team that have stuck for a while and have also very much influenced me.

But I think the big thing about that particular team was that in the future I want to teach. I love working with kids, and I realized that through the team because freshman year I started coaching. I volunteered for my first two years with the six-and-under age group, so the little ones, and they were super, super fun and I loved it. They were awesome. I kept going with it and I started leading some of the age groups and getting paid for it and everything, which was also nice. I think working with the kids on that team inspired me to work with kids more. So, I did Vacation Bible School and I was a Sunday School teacher for two years and that was a blast, too. So now that I'm here, I'm studying education as my minor, and I'm hoping to become an elementary school teacher. I honestly, truly almost solely, devote the reason why I want to become a teacher to that team. It influenced me that much to pursue that path.

Growing up—okay, going off of now on the churchy part—growing up, my family was very religious. We go to church most Sundays, not like every Sunday and Thursday or whatever it is. My faith, I think, is something that I held growing up quite a bit, and I think has helped me through really tough times, especially about a year period in high school where I was personally doing fine; it was just that a lot of people that were very close to me were having a tough time, and I tend to be a person who, when someone is going through something I take a lot of that emotional burden onto myself, too much so, which is something that I've been working on recently and I think have gotten better at. So, during those times when it was very hard, it definitely helped me get through that quite a bit. Even now at Santa Cruz, there's a church at the base of campus that I go to.

Vanderscoff: Oh, which one?

Herz: Peace United. Yeah, super fun. Very liberal and great, and I like the people there a lot. They're very friendly. They have jazz all the time and there's always one dude who dances a ton in the back. [Laughs] So I think that's something that definitely helped make me who I am.

Vanderscoff: So, you talked about faith and you talk about Sunday School. What denomination or what—

Herz: So, I was born Catholic and then when I was about eight or nine, something like that, we converted to Lutheranism. We changed churches to a Lutheran Church, and that was where I was going. And then the one here is United Church of Christ—UCC. So, it's been progressively more liberal as time goes on, which I'm now kind of realizing. [Laughter] The people there at the Lutheran Church I was going to definitely have been a good support, for sure.

Vanderscoff: So, you're describing some of the formative pillars of your life: you're talking about your family; you're talking about these early experiences with swimming, but also teaching. Then you're talking about faith. You describe your family as a tight-knit family. So,

growing up in that tight-knit family I'm curious, keeping an eye on how you ultimately wind up here at Santa Cruz, what sort of attitudes there were toward education in your family, and then how you responded to those growing up?

Herz: I remember the dinner when I realized I wanted to teach. For a little while I was wanting to go in the navy, because I just had no idea what I wanted to do. I kept flip-flopping between everything. And then my mom was saying, "Well, why don't you teach? You love working with kids." And I was like, "Oh, yeah." Then I really started thinking about it. They were incredibly supportive of it, very much so. I have a lot of family members who are also teachers. Two of them, my aunt and uncle who live in San Jose, are both teachers: one's fifth grade and one's Special Ed, and they absolutely love it.

I have a cousin down in LA and she's also a teacher. She was kind of the voice of realism for me. I was thinking, oh, it will be so much fun. It will be great. But she was the voice of realism. Like, "Hey, this is the reality of it. Do you still want to do this?" The thing is, teachers don't get paid a lot. Respect for teachers now, at least in my opinion, is not as much as it should be, in terms of parents to teachers. And it's hard. It's a lot of work and it's exhausting. This is what she was telling me one time when I was visiting. It's exhausting and it's draining as well. But it's also incredibly rewarding. And she kind of gave the "This is really what it is." She likes her job a lot, but she also recognizes there is an emotional toll to it. And that got me thinking, like, "Whew, ok." That was a little bit of a punch to the gut. I kept thinking about it and I started thinking about it more when I was in the moment with kids. And I realized that this is what I want to do. Emotional toll and exhausting as it is, this is what I want to do. I think that conversation, even though it was very serious and very like, "This is the realism of it. It's not all fun and games. This is a hard job," helped me solidify like, yeah this is actually what I want to do. I can I can do that.

So definitely my family had a big influence. They honestly have a big influence on all my decisions—[Laughs] I'm not going to lie—whether I like it or not. If they were all very, very against it, honestly, I don't know if I would be pursuing education—if they were all saying, "Don't do it, don't do it, don't do it," just because that's the kind of person I am. I very much listen to what they say, for better for worse, but my experience is it's definitely been for the better. But no, they're like, "You're going to do this." Then it was like, I think I am. And every time I sit in an education class and really think about it, I get more and more excited. For the last three years, I've known this is what I want to do.

Vanderscoff: So, you've had this awareness since high school. You're coming from a family where you have teachers in the family. And then, so far as the idea of going to college in general, what was your parents' attitude towards you going to college?

Herz: I was going to college. I was going to college. If I was going into the navy, I'd be doing ROTC in college. That was always something that was going to happen. Money or not, I was going to college. Now it's really hard to get out there and do well without a college degree. I mean, in my education class last year, we were looking at statistics, and I'm like, "Oh, man." Ever since I was little, I was going to college. There wasn't a moment where my parents were saying, "Yeah, if you want to go." And personally, I did want to go to college, too. I wanted the experience; I wanted the learning of it, because there's so many different opportunities, like going to Okinawa for two and a half weeks. So, I definitely wanted to do that and I wanted to get my degree. I was going to go.

Vanderscoff: And what sort of a background is there in your family in terms of getting post high school education?

Herz: In terms of direct lineage, honestly as far back as I can think, people have gotten their degree, so I know I'm not a first gen, at all. Which definitely gives me a lot of privilege.

Applying to UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: So, it's a foregone conclusion: you're going to go to school. So, do you mind, then, connecting the dots for how you wind up at this school here.

Herz: At Santa Cruz?

Vanderscoff: Yes.

Herz: When I was applying to schools, I wasn't exactly sure where I wanted to go. I was looking at different education programs and all that, but then I realized that for education, I don't necessarily need to pursue it until really afterwards, when I start getting my credential. [Before that there is a] little bit more leeway in terms of what I'm studying, which made it harder to decide [Laughs]. So, I applied to four UCs; I applied to Chico State, San Diego State, Southern Oregon, UConn, and Penn State. I didn't go back East because of out-of-state tuition. We could not afford it. I have two brothers heading after me. I would not be able to pay the tuition it would cost to go to Penn State, which I was one of my leading ones because my mom went to Penn State and we've always been a Penn State family.

So, I wasn't going to an out-of-state school because tuition was too high, and there wasn't anything there program-wise that would significantly put it ahead of somewhere that was here. So, then I was looking around and just in terms of where I got in, and what tuition rates were and everything, it came down to Southern Oregon, Chico, and here. I love Ashland, Oregon, where Southern Oregon is. It's one of my favorite cities. It's so great. I've been there twice, I think, and it's one of my favorite places. But, when I really thought about it, I don't know if I could have gone that far from home. Because again, what comes with the tight-knit family is knowing you're going to get homesick. With going to Penn State, I have family right there. Well, like two hours away, about the same distance from here to Pleasanton. So that was a

comfort; that was why that would have been fine, but I started to realize that it's Chico or Santa Cruz.

I visited both, and I'm like a big person with trusting my gut, and I just felt Santa Cruz. It was going to be Santa Cruz or UC Santa Barbara. Then I heard from Santa Barbara and I did not get in. I remember being so happy that I did not get into UC Santa Barbara. And when I realized that I was so happy when I got it, which was the reaction I was not expecting, by the way, I realized, okay, Santa Cruz is definitely the right place for me. I came during Spring Spotlight and I realized, like, this is it. I'm really feeling this place and I'm glad I made the decision.

Vanderscoff: So, tell me about some of those first impressions here, then, that made it clear that this was the place. You know, Spring Spotlight, whenever.

Herz: So, the first time I actually visited UC Santa Cruz was when I was in 7th grade about, or 8th grade. Because my family--one of the things we love to do, for whatever reason, was go and check out colleges. Yeah, so when we visited I remember, I just really liked it. It was beautiful and all that, and I had no idea at that time that this is where I would be going. Later on, as I started looking into it more, I visited it again during Spring Spotlight and, honestly, like, it's beautiful here. It's truly beautiful. The trees, the bridges. You're walking to class and then all of a sudden, you're like, oh crap there's a giant gorge in my way that I have to get across somehow. It's incredibly beautiful and that was one thing that resonated with me.

And then, just looking at the students and kind of like getting the vibe from them—it was very relaxed. It wasn't stressful at all, like when I visited Berkeley, for example. It was definitely my kind of vibe. I'm a very, very laid-back kind of person. Of course, I'll get the job done, but when it comes down to it, I'm way more laid-back, more relaxed, optimistic, easygoing. And that was definitely the vibe that I was getting off of this campus from the students that were just walking around. I was watching. And that's kind of, I think, what really, really drew me in. 'And also, the location of being in Santa Cruz is great. I like Santa Cruz. I like it a lot. I think honestly the

vibe was what drew me. I'm not one of those people who will look at the programs exactly, super in-depth, or the statistics of the school and everything. I'm one who will go and then feel it out and get that vibe and that's how I made my decision.

Arriving at UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: So, you make it at this gut level, which is informed by the fact that there's a vibe, there's an ambiance about this place and the people there. I'd like to fast forward a little bit then to your coming here. We talked about your first impressions of this place in general, but let's talk about Orientation, and then moving in, and what it is that you found here relative to those expectations.

Herz: So, Orientation, oh my goodness, this is like a total walk down memory lane, even though it was a year ago. [laughter] I remember way back when? [Laughter] Last year? So, Orientation was a blast. There was this guy, his name was William, and he and I kind of like clicked. We stuck together throughout the whole day. It was a good time. I have always been good at small talk, so meeting new people wasn't that much of a problem for me, and I really enjoyed it. Yeah, and I stuck with this guy for the whole day and it was really fun. We were walking around campus just looking at how incredible it was, also getting super-duper lost. Quite a bit. Even though they have flags like every five or ten feet to tell you you're on the right path, we still could not get it together.

We applied for classes and it started becoming real. Oh, my God, in those classes, you're like, ah, I'm a college student. And that realization, you're like, ooh! It was kind of scary almost. Yeah, it was a lot of fun. It was really hot. I remember that. That was my first experience of Santa Cruz weather. It was freezing in the morning, and I was like jeans, sweatshirt and everything. And then all of a sudden, right when it hit 11:00 or 12:00, all the clouds went away and it jumped up twenty or thirty degrees. I was like, "What the hell is going on?" I was sweating; we were trudging through the forest and trying to get from place to place on this

massive campus with a ton of hills. And yeah, we did not smell great. That was my Orientation experience, which honestly was a blast.

And then moving in—oh, moving in was so overwhelming. It was awesome, but it was definitely a lot. The first day, of course, my mom was trying to keep it together and whenever my mom cries, I cry, which is never a good thing. [Laughs] It sucks. So, I was like, "Keep it together, so I can." It was definitely a somber moment, that first time, when they were leaving and they closed the door and I was alone in my room. My roommates had moved in, but they were both gone somewhere, I don't know where. I was like, oh. It was silent. Oh, my god, what do I do now? So of course, I was unpacking and then I met my roommates and that was really cool. I had a good, decent roommate situation.

Vanderscoff: So, you were in a triple?

Herz: I was in a triple, which used to be a double. It was very, very small. We walked in and I was like, "This is a closet." You couldn't spread your arms apart. If you were in the middle of the room, you couldn't spread your arms apart all the way because the two beds were so close together. 'But honestly, after a month you get used to it and it's totally fine. My friends would come and visit me and they'd remark at how small it was and I was like, "Oh yeah, I guess it is kind of small." You kind of forget.

Yeah, that first week here was absolutely insane. Welcome Week—you have a ton of different programs, a ton of different stuff you have to be at. It was a lot of fun. I met so many people. We had a lounge. I was in Adams House, Room 217, and we had a lounge on one of the other floors and that lounge was kind of the thing that really brought everybody in my house together. Because the majority of my friends are from that house, are from the people I lived with, just because of that lounge. And I really attribute that to that room, that space and the power of that space to bring everybody together. I remember my third night staying up until 4 a.m. playing cards with six people I didn't know the week before. We were cracking up and laughing and

they were essentially still at that point strangers. Now they're some of my best friends. You were a lot more nervous as a first-year. It's kind of funny how much I've changed since that first week.

Vanderscoff: So, as you're thinking back to that time now, what are some of those obvious shifts that have that have happened in you, and what do you attribute them to?

Herz: Honestly, confidence, confidence in myself. I've always come off as a confident person, but always deep down I've had this complex. If I'm given an opportunity or anything I'm like, "I don't know if I can do this." For a lot of things, I've had people kind of push me into that direction. And in most cases, I've done well, at least in my opinion. But it's always taken a little bit of pushing him for me to become really comfortable. What I've noticed that changed about me here is me being more confident going into situations I'm not familiar with and taking a leadership role.

An example is the Gail Project. When I first joined, Alan [Christy, Associate Professor, UCSC History Department] had to convince me. He had to talk to me so many different times to convince me to join because I was like, "I don't know. I'm not really smart enough—da, da, da, da, da," So it was not enough confidence in my academic abilities, I guess. And as time went on, I've become a lot more confident. I mean, there's still moments where I'm kind of like, "Oh, I don't know," but I'm working on it because the things I've done I'm proud of. So, I think that's something that has been the biggest change, my ability to put myself out there on my own without really someone backing me up super close. Of course, I always rely on friends and everything for support, but, like, really do this on my own without someone standing next to me the whole entire time, and whatever job I'm given, to get it done to the best of my ability. I think that's been the biggest, most rewarding change.

Vanderscoff: Yeah. And we'll take the time to at least step through that main area of change that you're talking about. But before we loop back to that, staying in that early time when

you're at Cowell, you've talked about some of your introductory social experiences. I'm curious about the academic side, the core course, and those very early introductions that you have to what education is going to be like here.

Herz: Core course was good in the sense that it slowly inducted you into the college experience. But I did not get a lot out of the core course. That's just me personally. There's a bunch of classes for everybody that you just don't get a lot out of and that's just it. And then, there's others that you got a ton out of. It's different for everybody. But personally, I didn't get a whole lot of out of core course. It just seemed like another high school English class to me. People will disagree with me. That's totally fine. Then moving on to, I had my first history class—

Vanderscoff: So, was that 80A or 80B?

Herz: I was in 80A. And it kind of got me thinking back because I think 80B would have helped me better prepare. But, what are you going to do? It was first quarter. Then the college class that got me. It was the first one; it was Dr. [Lynn] Westerkamp [Professor of History], who I think is a phenomenal professor. She was teaching U.S. history from 1492 when Columbus sailed the ocean blue to around when the Civil War ended.

Vanderscoff: 1860s.

Herz: It was incredibly difficult for me because it totally threw me for a loop. I was like, that's a college lecture. It was a lower div, but I had to learn how to budget my time really quick. My first essay I got a B minus, I think. I've always been decent at writing essays, so that was a little bit of like an—ooh—because I thought I did a lot better. I was like oh, oh no. And at one point I think I had a C in that class and then I started working my way, and I ended up with a B, so I was happy about that. And I did a lot better afterwards, but it definitely kind of shook me for a little bit. Because before I wanted to pursue a history major; I wanted to be a history major, absolutely. And then after that class I was like, ooh, I don't know anymore. That was a lot

harder than I thought. Am I going to be good at it? I don't know. I think Dr. Westerkamp is a phenomenal professor and I really enjoyed her lectures because she teaches with lot of strength, and she's also very intimidating. I really respected that. But it was a hard class and it definitely shook my confidence in myself in terms of pursuing a history major. But what I realized was that it was my first class. I should have given myself an easier time because it was my first college quarter.

I took *Earth Catastrophes* also that quarter and that was easier. I did fine in that one. The next quarter I took a European history course. That was also difficult. I did a lot better in that course than I did in the U.S. History one. I think I got like a B plus or A minus, I can't remember. But I just remember thinking, wow, in European history, everyone has the same name. We have five Georges, a bunch of Henrys, and a gajillion wars! It was like middle school—oh my goodness. There was, like, a two-hundred-year war, a fifteen-year war maybe a seventeen-year war, and then like another fifteen. I'm like, good Lord, they need to be more creative in their names. So, I took that course and I did okay in it. I wasn't really feeling it though. But then, at the same time, I was taking Dustin's East Asian history survey course.

Vanderscoff: This is Dustin Wright.

Herz: Yeah. This is Dustin Wright. And that course, I absolutely loved. I was incredibly interested in all of it, and I got an A in that course. I did well. And I realized, when I was talking to Stephanie [Sawyer] as I was declaring my major, she was telling me how to declare a focus. And that's like Americas and Africa, Europe, or Asia and the Middle East. I was thinking about U.S. history at first, because I've taken it another bunch of times before. And then I took European, and I was like, I've taken this before. What I think I realized was the fact that I knew nothing about Asian history was what captivated me, was what kind of drew me in—the fact that all this is mostly new material to me. That totally drew me in because in the European

history course and then also the U.S. History course, there's a lot of stuff you were relearning from high school and zoned out a lot. And that totally drew me in.

And then the third quarter, I took another class with Dustin because I really enjoyed Dustin's teaching style—his Okinawa class. That class I also incredibly enjoyed. I took it because I knew Okinawa for the battle of Okinawa, and I was like, I like World War II, this will probably all be about World War II—which it wasn't, by the way. Stephanie was like, "It's a great class you should take it," and I was like, okay. I took it and I realized this isn't just about the battle. It totally changed my idea about Okinawa, because I learned so much about its history, which is a very interesting one. That class finally solidified that, "Yeah okay I'm done. I'm good with a history major." '

Vanderscoff: So, I'd actually like to backtrack a little bit because we've talked about your interest in education. I wonder if you could say a little bit about where that initial push towards history came from.

Herz: It slightly derived from my love for education. The best teachers I've ever had were all history teachers. The best ones that I've had were all history teachers. Freshman year, I had Mr. McCaffrey. He was a global studies teacher, so it wasn't exactly history, but it was culture and stuff like that, so it definitely had a lot of ties to it. And I was always ecstatic about going and he would always open the morning with some fancy quote that nobody really understood but kind of went along with. It was something about like, "Rise in the morning and you'll get it done." I don't know. But yeah, he was great. And then I had Mr. Murphy my sophomore year, who was teaching world history, and he was also phenomenal. Everybody thought he looked like Superman. He was excited about everything.

I had Mrs. Wohlgemuth, who was one of my all-time favorite teachers, hands down. She was my AP U.S. History teacher and she was absolutely phenomenal. Honestly, probably the best teacher I've ever had. She was excited about everything. For example, we were studying early

feminism in the late 1800s early 1900s. Actually, it was just anybody who was an activist, for whatever reason. We would dress up like them and we would each decide a character. And we did speed dating. I was Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Because I was also a drama kid—I forgot to talk about that—I had access to the costume bin. I had to ask my drama teacher, who is also one of the best teachers I've ever had, and Mrs. Kirksey was like, "Oh yeah, you can use a dress." I was like, "Cool!" So, I went for it. I was speed dating. It was great! And that's something I always remember because it really made history come alive and inspired me to pursue history more and also pursue teaching, because these people had such an impact on me. '

And then my senior year I had Mr. Ladd. It was AP government and econ, which I guess kind of tie in a little bit, and he was one of the most intimidating people I've ever met. I was scared to death, but he was hysterical and a great guy. So, I think the teachers that I had were the ones who inspired me to pursue history. That, and I love Indiana Jones.

Vanderscoff: So, between your educators and then Harrison Ford, (laughs) you're putting together a sense in which history is exciting, right. So that's happening. You're taking these history courses, and then are you also taking some courses that you know are—?

Herz: In education?

Vanderscoff: Yeah.

Herz: Yes, I am. So, I took my first education course spring quarter last year, Education 60 [*Introduction to Education: Learning, Schooling and Society*], with Kip Tellez. I really enjoyed his teaching. I liked him a lot. But, oh man, the material was so boring. Because it was very introductory and he even opened the class saying, "You're probably going to fall asleep more than a few times." I was like, "Oh, boy." Oh man, that class. It was hard, too, because the stuff they look for was specific. It was statistics about education: very, very broad. So, I was kind of innocent; I took it because it was a prereq, but I also kind of took it knowing I'm probably not

going to attribute a whole lot of this, but it is necessary to move forward. Which I still think is true. And now I'm currently taking Education 180, which is *Intro to Teaching*, which is about teaching, and I love that class so much. It's about teaching strategies, how to give students feedback, very specific stuff, and I'm like, yes, I can see myself using all this in my classroom. And then there's also—and I started this Tuesday—we get to observe in a classroom off campus. I think it's like I have to do a total of thirty hours for the quarter. And I'm in a kindergarten and a first-grade class.

I'm super-duper excited to really start observing. And now, it's becoming even more so real and I really see myself doing this. That's where I am right now, so I haven't gone as deep quite yet into the education minor, as I have the history major, but so far, it's absolutely great and I love every second of it.

Undergraduate Research: Okinawa and the Gail Project

Vanderscoff: Okay so that's happening in education. So, going back to history, When I jumped in, you were talking about taking this Okinawa class. The idea of history being something that's exciting, something that you can connect with emotionally is something that I'm very interested in. So, we know each other; we met in Okinawa.

Herz: That did happen. [Laughs] We drove many hours in the same car, very lost. [Laughter]

Vanderscoff: Exactly. Very lost on the wrong side of the road.

Herz: Oh my gosh, that's right!

Vanderscoff: On the other side of the world. So, I know that about you, but maybe some of the things that I don't know and certainly that we don't have on the record here, is how you've gotten involved. You said that Provost Alan Christy at Cowell sort of looped you into [The] Gail

[Project] when you were a freshman. I'd like to know about before that. Tell me more about your journey into the life of the college, so that you would know your provost in the first place.

Herz: Yeah. So, one of the things that I wanted to do—I wanted to build a close relationship with a professor who I could follow and be inspired by, and everything like that. And after Alan's first plenary, I was like, "He's a really cool guy," someone who I feel like I could definitely relate with. So, I went up to him and I'm like, "Hey, I'm going to be a history major. Also, I want to teach. We're the same." And he's like, "Yeah." It was totally like the most awkward conversation starter. I could have gone off a lot better than that, but Alan at first was an incredibly intimidating person, because he was such a big personality. And then I got to know him. He's a big personality, very intelligent, and also a great speaker. So, going up to him I was like, "Hey, ah, ah—" [nervous laughter]. And then instantly he engaged me in conversation and we were talking about it for about like two or three minutes. And then that was it. And then I was like, "Okay, bye." Then later on, it was about a week later, I passed him and he was like, "Hey, Tommy." What? How did you remember my name? I didn't think he did and he did! Totally, like, blew me away. And I was like, "Hey, Alan." And all my friends were like, "You know Alan?" And I was like, "Yeah, of course I do." Even I only had, like a two-minute conversation with him. Yeah. And then Alan knew who I was and he knew where I was kind of going.

And Stephanie, when I was declaring my major and said I was interested in Asian history. Stephanie said, "You might want to look into the Gail Project," and then I'm assuming Alan found out that she had mentioned it to me, and also Alan was telling me about it. And he was like, "Hey, so are you coming to Okinawa with me over the summer?" I was like, "What?" And he's like, "You coming to Okinawa?" And I was like, "I don't know." And he was like, "Well I think you should." And I was like, "Okay," even though I really had no intention to join. And then he kept pushing it and pushing it.

Vanderscoff: When you're just seeing each other around the college?

Herz: Yeah. Oh, I took his *World War II Memories* course. That was another course I took. I took a lot of history courses. Holy moly. I took his *World War II Memories* course, which was also phenomenal. It was him and Alice Yang [Associate Professor of History], and he's always, of course, goofing off in like in front of the whole entire class, and Alice, who is also one of my favorite professors I've had, is like definitely a lot more to the point and on book. And the two of them are like best friends too, which made it so much better. And Alan would make some sort of really bad joke and she would give the biggest eye roll in the back corner of the classroom you'd ever seen. She'd be like, "Alan, please." [Laughs] And that was great, that was a little off track, but it was still a great class. So, I saw him all the time in that one, and every two or three lectures he would always make it a point to be like, "Hey, so when are you joining the Gail project," to the point that I was like, "Okay, I'm coming to a meeting."

I went to a meeting and I was like, this is cool, but I was very intimidated because everybody seemed very, very smart and I didn't feel that way. So, I kept going, and then the trip came up of going Okinawa, and it was going to be four weeks at the beginning of the summer, as a class. And I couldn't do it because of my job I have back home. Coaching, actually, for swim. And I was like, "Okay, that's too bad," because I was kind of like not really about going anyway, because I was intimidated. That's why. And then they moved it, because it wasn't working out. Not enough people were signing up because they couldn't do all four weeks. I think they had one less person who signed up. So, they moved it to two weeks, end of August, early September. I was like, "Oh my God, I can make that." And then I was like, oh, screw it. I'm going to do it. And I signed up and went and it was the best two and a half weeks in my educational experience. It was absolutely phenomenal.

Vanderscoff: And so, before we get into that, I realize we should say, for the record, what is the Gail Project?

Herz: Oh, the Gail Project. It's a team of student researchers, mostly undergrads. We do have one grad student. And also made up of other people, like Alan, Alice, a man named Cameron Vanderscoff from New York, who is an oral historian, who's you. [Laughter] So it's kind of a cool conglomeration of faculty, ex-students, a grad student, a bunch of undergrads, and we all come together to research Okinawa. So, there's a man named Dr. Charles Eugene Gail, who was a dentist here, and during dental school he was drafted to serve in the army at the Okinawa base, during the Korean war from '52 to '53. And while he was there, he had always had a passion for photography, so while he was there he was taking photos of a lot of different things. People, scenery in Okinawa— really glimpsing into the culture. Geri Gail, his daughter, still had those photos. And she got in touch with Shelby [Graham], who is the curator at the Sesnon Gallery, and then she got in touch with Alan, who's an Okinawa expert and also the provost at Cowell College who got me on the team. And they said, "We can make an exhibit out of this. This is really cool. These photos are very telling of the culture of Okinawa and could really give the story of it." And they assembled the team. For a few years, they have used this team to start doing research, analyzing documents, putting them in the context of the photos. And then it was time to put together a big exhibit which we did this year.[6]

Vanderscoff: So that's the Gail Project. So, then you were just talking about going to Okinawa, and I'm interested in this from your perspective, because you had taken a class on this subject before on the history of this place called Okinawa. And so, I'm curious then, if you could think, and maybe you could think of some specific examples from the trip—you had learned about this by reading about it. And I'm curious about what your experience was then learning about it experientially there, what the difference was between those two things?

[6] See http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8t43w8t/admin/ for a guide to the UCSC Library's collection of the Charles Gail Photographs. See https://news.ucsc.edu/2017/09/gail-project-exhibition.html for more on the exhibit at the Porter Sesnon Gallery at UCSC. And see https://gailproject.ucsc.edu/ for the general website on the Gail Project.—Editor.

Herz: It was completely different. When you're in a classroom learning about a place far away that you don't think you'll ever go to—which I didn't at the time I was taking it, in the beginning, at least—you learn what's in the book. That's it. What's in the book, you learn about it; you read some documents; you analyze some primary sources, and you write research essays. But going there is *so* different, because when you're there, you pick up on the little things, like how the culture is, the nuances. When you're there you understand history of it more on a personal level. For example, we—and we also learned about this in my World War II class, too, with Alan and Alice [Yang], about on Okinawa how many Okinawan civilians committed suicide because the Japanese government told them that if they were captured the Allied soldiers would do horrible things and eventually kill them, so it's better to do it by your own hands, or your family's hands instead, which is a horrible, horrible thing that happened. So, a whole lot of people committed suicide during the war, which they were not fighting in. And you're reading about this and you're like, "Okay that's really, really sad." But that's about it. When you go there, and we went to one of the caves, specifically Chibichiri-gama, it's a completely different thing. You walk up to the cave, and this is a cave where about forty people committed suicide by lighting mattresses that were in the cave on fire. And a lot of other things that I just don't want to repeat because it was really horrible. But when we were standing in front of that cave, it was a completely different, completely different feel.

It was eerie, powerful, and immense, when you're really feeling what it's like to be there. You're learning about all the deaths and now you're actually seeing where it happened and what it looks like. And you're looking around you and up at the trees, and you see the cliff side that's right above the cave where the American soldier called down, and now you're seeing how it's really hard to see what he looks like, and better interpret that he's okay. And then you also realize the close proximity of where another cave was, where everybody was about to do the same thing, except there was one farmer who had spent time in San Francisco, and was saying, "Hey, we'll be okay." And everybody survived in that cave because of that one person. And

that close proximity, where it's completely two different outcomes as to what happened. Honestly, in education, I think there's nothing more powerful than that space, the power of the space and being in that space.

Vanderscoff: And so, you talked about Chibichiri-gama. I wonder if we could expand to talk about an overview of your role in this trip? We're talking about these processes of learning. So, one way of talking about that is what was your function in the team?

Herz: I'll be honest. In the beginning, I didn't know. [Laughs] I'll just put it right out there. I really had no clue. I was also kind of nervous to ask. I think Alan did a good job of putting me in different places to kind of realize what I wanted to do. I went to a fundraising meeting. My original research was on Futenma Base in Ginowan. But I realized what I really wanted to do was study the testimonies, and start learning about oral history, and start taking a place in that. That's something that I realized halfway through. So, my function? I guess, I didn't have one until the trip, really. I mean, I had one, but I didn't truly have one, if you know what I mean.

So, what I did for the exhibit was I complied a lot of testimonies that we got from Himeyuri Museum in the southern part of Okinawa. I compiled a bunch of them and formatted it into a little booklet that we put up in the exhibit. And that was my contribution, which I was very excited about. And so now I'm on the oral history team, and I'm also still on the fundraising team too, and that's kind of what I do.

Vanderscoff: We're doing an oral history right now. I'm curious about what thinking about testimonials, or engaging with history through oral history, how that attracted you, and what you think that does for you as a learner?

Herz: So again, this kind of goes with the relationship between being in the space learning about it, and then being in the classroom learning about it. Being in a space is more personal. Reading the testimonies is far more personal. When we went to Himeyuri Museum, it was

about these girls who attended Himeyuri School and were essentially enlisted to perform as nurses during the battle, and a lot of them passed away during the fighting. So, this museum was dedicated to their memory. We were going around and we were looking at different artifacts, like medical cases, and there was a syringe and a bunch of things like that, and then reading the statistics and all that. And then we walk into this big dark room. And in this room, on one side there's a giant replica of the cave that a large group of them were in, where the most perished in the same instant. And it was a lot of them. And in this room, there were giant books at different sections filled with testimonials taken from the accounts of the Himeyuri women. And reading those—I just stood there and I read for about an hour, a really long time. I read every single one and it grabs you on an incredible personal note, because now you're not just reading the statistics, you're reading what those people felt, and what happened to them specifically, and how it impacted them. And you get a feel for the pain that they felt, as well, from the horrible, horrible things that happened to them.

So, I feel, in terms of an exhibit, how beneficial testimonies are—lot of people may not be as big history buffs as you and I are. So, in terms of grabbing them with the goal of hoping that they appreciate what they have read and learned about, testimonies, in my opinion, are one of the best ways to do that, because it sends everything on a more personal level.

Vanderscoff: And another component about Okinawa, which is interesting—as you mentioned, there're different members of the Gail Project team: there's alums, grad students, there's faculty, staff. But the bulk of the Gail Project is undergrads. So, you have, of course, been in many classes with undergrads. That's what you're here to do; that's what you're doing. I'm curious if you could comment on the experience of learning with your peers, of learning with undergrads and being a part of an undergraduate team, both for the Okinawa trip and then for the exhibit that follows that. I'm curious if you could comment on that, and how that might impact the way in which you connect with your education.

Herz: I believe that you never truly stop learning and that you can't really learn alone. Being part of a team, to research with all these other people who have a different goal—how do I say this? It's definitely something I wasn't used to before because I hadn't done it. So, I don't really know how to describe it, or compare it to graduate work or anything like that on the scale that we did it. It's different than a group project that you would do in a classroom, because that's with people who aren't really interested, and it's a group project nowhere near the scale of what we did. But in the beginning, at least for me personally because I joined spring quarter, I didn't really know a whole lot of people. I knew Nirupama Chandrasekhar, and that's it, because she was another first year. But other than that, and everybody came to the meetings and we did our thing and that was about it. And that was great.

And then we went to Okinawa and the bond that we formed was so very close. We all instantly became really, really good friends; joking, giving each other a lot of grief for everything. So, with the common goal of learning, everybody became super close because we all had a project that we wanted to make good. We all had the same determination to make this project good, which I think is kind of different than going on a trip somewhere with a bunch of people, but not really for a research project, just to, like, learn about it. This bond of producing something with all of our names on it brought us together even more.

And then coming back, it's a completely different vibe, [compared to] what it was spring quarter. Now everybody's super close; we have a big Snapchat group. We're always still seeing each other. We'll hang out after exhibit nights. And building up the exhibit, I'd always get excited to go over there to help out, because I know at least one person from the trip was there. And I could hang out with them and we could talk. Gosh, I love those people. Yeah. And it's a lot of fun.

There was one night we had a karaoke night at the exhibit. We called it "Country Roads" and Cameron Gao and I ran it. And, oh my gosh. Had Cameron and I not formed the friendship that

we made on the trip it would have been so awkward. But when we were there, because it was just the two of us, plus Nirupama Chandrasekhar, and then there were three or four random people who were coming to participate. Last year it would have been so awkward. I mean, like what are we singing [muttering indistinctly]. But no, we were going for it, and we were having a great time. We were playing a ton of songs that we played from the trip. And that's because now we were all very, very close. So, I think it's definitely an interesting bond of a group that I haven't seen before. Because we're still working on the project. Just because we had the exhibit up, doesn't mean we're done. We're now putting up another exhibit and then we're hopefully going to go back to Okinawa next summer. And then who knows how this project will expand. So, we're constantly pursuing a goal. We're constantly working together and having a good time. So, I'm not sure how that experience would compare with anything else, but that's how the experience was for me.

Vanderscoff: And so then for the record, something like this "Country Roads" thing, these Wednesday nights, maybe you could explain, for the record, how they fit into—

Herz: Yeah, absolutely. So, every week we're going to try and have an event. So, for example we had one man—his name is Art Bobroskie, and he grew up on the island. And he is half Okinawan and half white, and he gave a mini-lecture, essentially. It was really insightful and very interesting. And so, that was one of them. The next Wednesday was our "Country Roads" music-athon, or whatever you want to say. We had a Taco Rice night. That was another one, where we made Taco Rice, which is a food in Okinawa. It's Okinawan. It's geared toward the military men that are on the island. So, we made Taco Rice. Alan is going to speak at one; Alice is going to speak at one about oral history. So that's essentially what it is. It's different events to get people to come.

Vanderscoff: So, before we move on to a couple other topics that I have, is there anything further that you'd like to say about being a part of the Gail Project, or the trip, or being a part of

this ongoing project now at the Sesnon Gallery? Is there anything else that we ought to cover that we haven't?

Herz: Honestly, I don't think so. I think we're good.

Cowell College

Vanderscoff: Fantastic. So, then I know that, more recently, you've been involved in Welcome Week. So, you've come in as a freshman, and then now you're in the position, to some degree, of representing Cowell to others. First of all, just to loop back, I don't think we ever got this, could you say a little bit about your motivation in coming to Cowell in the first place, how you wound up at this particular college?

Herz: Honestly, I liked the theme of it: "The Pursuit of Truth in the Company of Friends." I saw "friends," I was like, "Oh, that sounds fun." And also, the fact that Cowell has the best location on campus. It's as close as you can be to everything. The view is incredible. It's right next to the gym. So, it was like, a lot of location stuff, too. And I'm glad I did, because I feel each college kind of has their own thing, and I definitely like Cowell a lot.

Vanderscoff: What do you think distinguishes Cowell, for better or for worse, or for whatever?

Herz: I haven't really experienced any of the other colleges and how they do it, but I definitely know Cowell has a rep for being more social. Partying, in a way. (laughs) But definitely more like a social kind of vibe; everybody is very out-there. It's always loud. Like, I remember being in the dorms—there are people talking at full volume until two in the morning, which, again, you got used to, but in the beginning, was like oh my goodness, I like that we're all friends, but please. [Laughs]

It's hard to say how it compares to the others, without having been at the others. I think Cowell's the best one, but you could easily go up to someone at Porter and they will say Porter

is the best one, or you can talk to my friend Evan and he'll say Oakes is the best one. But I'm happy with my choice.

Vanderscoff: So, you're at Cowell. Tell me a little bit about the process of being involved with Welcome Week and now being a part of orienting others to this place.

Herz: So, I was talking a little bit earlier about Welcome Week and my experiences with it, and how there are tons of programs and stuff, and the fact that that kind of really impacted me, in terms of being inducted into college. It helped me want to pursue becoming a Welcome leader. I mean, of course there are few extra benefits of it, like there's a housing point, which would mean we'd get better housing. But honestly, I truly wanted to do it because of the job. It's volunteer, which is fine. So, I applied spring quarter, got the position, one of them, and we had a few meetings and it was just regular meetings. And then, this is kind of like the Gail Project, because we had those meetings in the beginning, but then in the summer, those two weeks when we were here for Welcome Week prep, and then the actual Welcome Week, we all bonded so much. It was completely different vibe than at the beginning.

So, then it comes, and we got on campus two weeks before everyone else did, which was a lot of fun, for various reasons. We spent those two weeks prepping. Just hardcore prep; all our programs and stuff. Me and my friend Spencer, we ran a hike together, and when we were making these flyers, we put cutouts of our faces on them and then titled it "Tommy and Spencer's Adventure Hike," and gave it a thing that made it stand apart, and we ended up getting like sixty-eight people on this hike, in total. I was walking; I was leading this group, and Spencer was kind of going back and forth making sure we didn't lose anybody as we were heading into upper campus where we were giving the hike, and I had this mass of people following right behind me. I felt like Moses leading the Israelites. [Laughs] It was great. I mean, a little less holy and more like, "Let's go to the forest." (laughs) Oh, my God, that was so fun. It

was awesome. We had a lot of fun. And the fact that we were impacting the first-years, hopefully for some of them the way I was impacted, really gave me a good feeling.

Yeah, and then it also set me up for another position, which is paid, as a Programs Assistant with Cowell. I'm essentially writing a bunch of programs, such as College Nights, Open Mic nights and everything at Cowell College. And one of the other people who shares the position with me, her name is Holly, and she is a first-year. She went on my hike, and when she came in she recognized me, and she's like, "Oh my God, you led the hike." I was like, "Yeah." And then she said, "That hike was how I met my best friends." And I was like, "Oh my God," I was, like, totally freaking out, "Oh, really? Oh, man!" Because that's how I met two of my closest friends here, was on that hike last year. Yeah, so it was completely the same deal, and I felt like it was full circle, where I was on that hike and I met two of my best friends, and then I led the hike and she met a few of her best friends. And it was a really, really good feeling, and put Welcome Week into a whole perspective. Because it was lot of work and a big commitment, huge commitment. For example, I wanted to work on the exhibit but I never had time. I was not able to do it for a second until Welcome Week was over. But that really put it into perspective: okay, I did something. That was awesome. That was so fun.

Vanderscoff: Where did you lead the hike?

Herz: Upper campus. So, we started at Cowell and took them to upper campus, walked around up there, and showed them the painted barrels, and the cat sanctuary, and the totem pole. It was fun. We didn't get lost that much, and it was great.

Financial Pressures

Vanderscoff: So, shifting to a different part of education, something that I've asked everyone in this project and is a big part of being a student for many folks, is the financial aspect, thinking about how are you going about paying for this. So, I'm curious about any comments that you

might have, or anything you might wish to share about the financial aspect of UCSC. People have given a lot of different responses about this, but we're curious about how people are adapting to the financial reality that the university is in.

Herz: College is too expensive. [Laughs] I mean, of course I can't speak with all the knowledge of exactly where all our dollars are going to and everything., But holy moly, for something that you really need, it's very hard to obtain, because of the monetary resources that you have. My family, we'll be able to pay. I mean, I've already taken out few loans. I'll have to pay off a lot later on, which as an elementary school teacher may take a bit, considering that salary. [Laughs] Yikes! But it's always been an issue. I know financial aid, at least from what I've heard from friends, is incredibly difficult to obtain. For us, we are just above that mark where we would be able to get financial aid for sure, just above it. And I have two more brothers. So, it's still a constant worry for us to be able to pay for college, because I have two brothers going in after me. But in our case, I am fortunate and privileged enough to say we're likely going to pay. I mean, we'll have to take out a ton of loans and everything. But there's a lot of students here who really, really depend on scholarships and a lot of financial aid. I have a friend who's on a full ride and she's worried that if she doesn't get the grades she might lose it and therefore cannot go here. And I have another friend who isn't going here anymore. He was here last year, and they took his financial aid away, and now he can't go to Santa Cruz anymore because he can't afford it.

Vanderscoff: They took his financial aid away because of—

Herz: I'm not exactly sure. Which is complete bummer, because he was a really nice person and someone I got along with very well. But in a perfect world you wouldn't need money to do things. I mean, of course that's a long shot, and impossible, I think. But it's really a shame that college is so incredibly expensive that you have to essentially dictate how you obtain the knowledge that you will use in your future by your bank account. Like, how much money do

you have? Again, I'm not exactly educated on how our money is used and what exactly the university needs and all that, but I do know it sucks.

Vanderscoff: So, for you then, reality is a mix of parental support and then loans–

Herz: Exactly, yeah. I definitely have a lot of parental support. I have two jobs now to kind of help. I want to start buying my own books. They helped me out last year, but I'm starting to try and become more independent, and I already have been. No, the bulk of the tuition and everything my parents are helping pay for, and then the loans I'll be paying off after.

Vanderscoff: So, you're paying for this education. We talked about some of the educational venues that you found: different classes, different experiences, different team participations. One thing I want to be sure we don't skip over is the role of staff in your time here. So, you talked about Stephanie Sawyer [advisor in the history department] and I imagine that you must have had exposure to college staff in your current role with the college. So, I wonder if you could say a little bit about the role of college and departmental staff members at your time here.

Herz: Yeah, absolutely. The people that I've met who work here have been absolutely phenomenal. Alan is definitely the person who is a mentor, absolutely. My boss, Kara [Snider], who is the Cowell programs coordinator, I enjoy her a lot too. She's the organization master. Already in the two weeks I've worked with her for Welcome Week, I learned a lot. And then Stephanie, oh my God, I love Stephanie. She's one of those people—in her position as an advisor where she excels is being able to talk to the students about anything other than what you're there in the meeting to talk about, which I personally really appreciate. She taught me how to scramble eggs. I was really proud of myself. I fried an egg; I didn't burn it that much, and I'm like, "I'm going to try a scramble." So, she's like, "Here's a tip," and then she told me something about water. And I was like, "Okay." And I tried it and it worked! It was good. I was there to figure out study abroad. But then it totally segued into other things, but that what

builds a relationship, I think, between the advisor and student, is the ability to talk about what you aren't there to talk about.

The City of Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: I'm glad we have some of that about the staff. So, another part of student experience here is the city itself. You already mentioned that you go to Peace United Church just off campus, but I'm curious if you could talk more in general, about what sort of experiences you have downtown, and what role the city plays in your time here.

Herz: So, I'm looking to get more involved downtown, but at least for the first year, it was definitely a place to get away from campus, because the city and campus are very, very different. I mean, look around. So, it's like for a day where we just want to get off campus, or are stressed out or something, you take the bus, you go downtown, maybe go to the beach, go to the pier. And that's just a great, great thing to have because part of being independent college is also being able to, like, you know, be in real life, too. And of course, living on campus you don't really get a lot of that. So, it's a nice escape from the academic world to normal life, essentially. I think that's the role it's played for me. In terms of church, I take the bus to the base of campus and I walk two blocks and I'm there. That's something that's meant a lot to me. I don't go every Sunday, because I can't. It's incredibly busy up here and it takes a lot to get down there without a car, especially on Sundays. The bus schedules are terrible. But, yeah, I really like it a lot. It's a great place.

Attitudes Towards Religion at UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: We had one of the other students in this project talk about coming to Santa Cruz with religion, being Christian specifically. And she spoke about running into some barriers with that in terms of some of the classes, in terms of maybe some of the attitudes that people had about religion here. And so, I'm curious if you could comment, as someone who was raised up

predominately in the Lutheran Church and is now attending Peace United Church, what you can say about the climate here, I suppose particularly on campus, as it relates to your faith, and how you relate to it.

Herz: Hmm. What's interesting is there's a lot of people here who are definitely atheist, but I tend to try and do my best to respect other people's beliefs, no matter what they are. And in turn, what I found, for the most part, at least the people that I have become friends with, they respect mine. And it's, honestly, totally fine. I really haven't had any issues whatsoever with my faith conflicting with any other people's values, or anything on campus. I know there's a few Christian organizations on campus, like Klesis [Christian Fellowship], for example, which I've been to one meeting of and really enjoyed it, but the only thing is, just with my schedule I can't go. So yeah, honestly, my on-campus faith is—it's more impacted me to myself and my own mind, like, when I'm going through a stressful time and then it'll help me. But in terms of me practicing it on campus, like, with other people: I haven't. I've always gone off campus for that. It has nothing to do with the campus, so much as my schedule. I don't know. There's not really a whole lot I can speak to about that. A lot of people don't know. Not that I'm keeping it a secret; they just don't know. And for some reason, it's always a surprise.

Vanderscoff: People are surprised to learn that you—

Herz: Yeah that's something that I've found interesting here. I don't think people—at least the people that I've talked to, again—really talk about their religious beliefs a whole lot, I think out of fear, almost, of being challenged, which I guess you could find here. But again, personally I haven't had any negative interactions, or honestly whole lot of interactions. At least for me personally.

Vanderscoff: But in some cases, people have been surprised when you identify yourself as Christian.

Herz: Yeah. That's something that's kind of funny, like a funny conversation starts, like, "Oh yeah, I was at Sunday school teacher." People will always kind of chuckle and then someone will always be like, "Oh, you're Christian? Oh, I didn't know that." I'm like, "Yeah." I mean, it's not something that I personally feel is a bad reaction. They just didn't know.

Transitioning from Home to UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: So your faith is something that you were brought up with at home. And you mentioned that you were brought up with a tight family, and then when you come here, there's some emotional challenge in that, in that you're not surrounded by that tight-knit family on a day-in, day-out basis. So, I'm wondering, now that you're a year into this experience, if you can reflect on that transition, what moving away from that type of experience has meant for you, and some of the ways in which Santa Cruz is different from Pleasanton.

Herz: Oh, there are so many ways.

Vanderscoff: If we could explore that theme in an open-ended way.

Herz: Yeah. So, leaving home, that first about three weeks to a month was totally fine. I was rocking. Classes started; Welcome Week was happening. So much was going on. But then, as everything started falling into more of a routine, and it kind of simmered down, I became incredibly, incredibly homesick. Incredibly so. Not to the point where I was like, I have to go home, but there was a moment, actually it was after the election; I was incredibly upset with the results, me personally, and so was everybody else on campus. And I kind of needed to just get away because I deal with my own feelings by not being in that situation and kind of taking a mental break from it all. I was incredibly upset and the fact that a lot of the people around me—because this is predominantly liberal—everybody around me was also incredibly upset and I just kind of need to get away. So, I think that's the first time I was like, I'm so homesick. I was. I just need to go home.

I went home for the weekend and it was great. I was in theater in high school, and I went to go see a show at they were doing that just so happened to be going on at the same time. It was like a nice little back to my roots kind of thing. I came back totally recharged and ready to go. But that was the hardest month, October, especially because my birthday was on the fifth. So, it was, like, my birthday, and then it was like we were really settling in, and then the election. And I was, like, okay, I just need to go home. I went home and then I came back recharged, ready to go.

And throughout the whole year, I was always homesick. Not to the point where I was considering going back home again. That was the only time where I went back. But there was always a little part of me that was like, "I miss home right now." And now that summer's passed and I'm back, I definitely feel a lot more comfortable here. But again, there's always that small fiber of me that still feels homesick, you know? That always gets excited to FaceTime my mom back home, and excited to see my brothers again and my dad. Yeah. But I think it's important to not never not be homesick, I think. Because you always want to remember where you came from and who is really important to you. I'm trying not to eliminate that feeling of homesickness. I'm trying to keep a small part of it with me all the time because it reminds me of who I am and where I came from. I mean, it's not something where I'm constantly thinking about it, or I'm, like, "Gosh, I really wish I was home," because I absolutely love it here. Oh, my goodness.

The Election of Donald Trump to the Presidency

Vanderscoff: So, there's that. So, you bring up the election, and this is something that's come up in every single student interview.

Herz: Has it really?

Vanderscoff: Yeah.

Herz: Oh, my goodness.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, and I reflect on this personally because I was here when Obama was elected for the first time. And so, then I reflect that you're here when Trump's elected.

Herz: Very different.

Vanderscoff: Yeah. And so, I wonder if you could say a little bit more about how the election went down on the campus, for you personally, and then a little bit more broadly. And if you could start with that, and then follow that closer to the present.

Herz: Honestly, I wasn't crazy about either of the two [candidates]. I don't want to talk too much about it because I try not to. I'm not a very political person. I try not to involve myself in politics so much, just because from what I've seen, it's just a lot of people arguing and trying to talk over each other and really not anything getting done. I feel like if people just sat in a room and calmly talked about their opinions, recognizing you're probably not going to change the other side's mind, but trying to learn something about the other side—I think that's what I'm about. But unfortunately, you don't see that a lot here.

But no, the election was—it was not a fun night. People were crying; people were incredibly upset, especially minority groups who really feared for themselves. I don't have very fond memories of that night. People protested—it was crazy. And then I went home the next day or the day after. But yeah, there was protest happening everywhere; people were incredibly upset. The campus was—the vibe that I so loved in the beginning when it was easygoing and everything had completely gone away, understandably.

And then throughout the next year—it is kind of interesting being on a very, very politically active campus when everything is going on, because you're really experiencing a lot. And comparing that with Pleasanton, in Pleasanton you do not get that at all. At all. It's a little bit more conservative, in terms of the older people in Pleasanton are very, very conservative and

most of the younger people in Pleasanton are pretty liberal. It's completely changing now. 'So, it was definitely kind of a culture shock to me now seeing all these very active movements. I was involved with one or two, but not in a major scale or anything. It was definitely a little bit of a culture shock.

But the other problem from it is now it's just created a rise in tensions between the liberals of campus, which is the majority, and then the more conservative thinkers on campus, which is definitely the minority. I have a lot of opinions about that, including about recent moments. I usually don't like voicing my opinion about certain events because people just get angry and you don't really get anything across. I think it was, like, a week and a half ago. There was an incident where the College Republicans were meeting, right here in the library actually, right here in the basement. And a few, I would say, more left-leaning liberals came in. They made a lot of assumptions about the people that were there, calling them white supremacists, racists. Stuff like that. There was one instant where [a woman] was talking to one of the guys who was there, and she yells, "You're just racist; you're a Republican, you're racist." And I'm like, that's not the same thing. And then he says, "I'm actually a Democrat. I came here to talk about my opinions in a normal discussion. You are not here to do that."

And that was an interesting moment. It is interesting how someone who claims to be very, "I'm accepting of everyone, I'm accepting of all views. I'm very open," can be so closed in that moment. She and the other guy who was there with her, those two people just could not—they were not willing to discuss, they were making assumptions about everybody in that room, which is the same thing that a lot of liberals on campus attribute to conservatives: the unwillingness to discuss. I'm definitely a liberal and don't agree with most all Republican views, but I value calm discussion and the importance of hearing out the other side. The liberals who had entered the meeting accused the College Republicans of promoting racism in their meeting. And one girl who was there raised her hand and said, "Uh, we were debating on, like, if it should be big or small government." And it was just, I don't know. But it's something I've

been thinking about recently and, I don't know—it gives liberals a bad name. And I identify as liberal. But it was definitely something [I felt]—you were in the wrong there. I feel that the group opposing the Republicans did not take any time to hear out the other side. It is important to recognize that calm discussion does not mean you are going to change the other sides' mind. But if each side is able to learn something about the other, then there is something that is gained from that, I think. '

Vanderscoff: So, this is a time where many people are voicing their opinions more clearly and more vocally than they had in the past. The stakes seem heightened in some way. And I wonder, if it would be all right, if you would reflect a little bit about your own impulse to be quieter about that, to be more restrained about that, in this time particularly, right?

Herz: I think in this time, particularly, there's a lot of anger on both sides. And I also feel like both sides are slowly moving even farther and farther away from being moderate, in the middle, where they can talk. Everybody has opinions and a lot of people are very hell bent on their opinion is the right opinion, to the point where they won't listen to anybody else. I have seen, time and time again, where people will voice their own opinion and immediately just get completely shut down with—and usually this is on Facebook, of course, because you don't really have a discussion where people go up and say it that often unless you're with a bunch of like-minded people, I've noticed. And immediately, just tons of comments that are just angry. I'm not a very angry person, so I just don't like dealing with those situations whatsoever. So, I try not to put myself in them.

And then also for me personally, because I'm not very involved in politics—I mean, of course I vote and everything, and I'll learn about the people I'd be voting for, but because I'm not incredibly involved in politics, I usually don't like debating on it, or talking about it, because I don't feel like I have enough knowledge about it to do that. So, I tend to be a little bit quieter. And then, of course, with this situation, my personal opinion is the world would be a much

better place if people focused on, instead of being overcome by their own opinions and trying to force those on other people—and both sides, conservatives and liberals, are guilty of this—trying to sit down and have an honest discussion. Not trying to convince the other person that you're right, because you won't. That's not going to happen right away. But having an honest discussion, hoping to learn something about the other side, hoping to do that. There was a great video—do you know Sarah Silverman?

Vanderscoff: Mm-hmm.

Herz: Yeah, okay. So, Sarah Silverman, who's a comedian and outspoken liberal, she went to the house of a very conservative family, and she had dinner with them. I absolutely love the video. And they were having some discussions about different political topics and she disagreed with them and they disagreed with her, but in a very professional way. And in the end, it was essentially a "we can agree to disagree kind of thing." And she said, "I built a great relationship with them, I really do like these people. Do I share their beliefs? No. Did I change their minds? Hell, no. But that's okay. We're one step closer." And that's the exact thing that I think needs to happen, is people sitting down and having an honest conversation about their opinions without expecting to change the mind of others, but fully expecting to learn something about the other. That's what I think needs to happen. And people get so caught up in their own opinions. Do I think it's going to happen? No, I don't think that's going to happen.

Vanderscoff: Well, a part of what I've heard from many, many of the students who have been in these interviews—and this would be particularly students who are involved in activism, and particularly students of color—they would say that the stakes are already past that point, the rhetoric and the actions that are being directed against them, the lack of safety is already at a level where that kind of thing can't happen for them.

Herz: Exactly, yeah. That's another thing that I've also thought. So again, to put this into context, I'm speaking about this as a straight, white, Christian male from a suburban town

where there is no crime, from a family that was very close. If you have a checklist of everything that marks you as privileged, I have it. It's just something that happened. 'And so, I'm, of course, saying that from my own perspective. Now, if I was from a minority, I might say something different, which is also again why I try to refrain from a lot of politics because you're not going to be able to have enough experiences to really say what's right, because there's always going to be someone, especially in my case coming from such a privileged background. I don't know what it's like to be in the minority and fighting for your own rights and for a better life. I don't know what that's like. So of course, I'm saying "Oh, we can sit down and have an honest discussion about it," which I feel like would be great. But there could be someone else who's been constantly squashed under the foot of society their whole entire life, and they will feel differently, which is totally okay.

Final Reflections

Vanderscoff: And, so, moving toward a conclusion here, I'm interested in the impact that this place has had on you. And so, I'm going to ask you a question, and you can elaborate on it. I'm curious if you could say more about where that awareness of yourself in that way, as belonging to those categories of privilege, including where you're from and being white and so forth—I'm curious about where that awareness comes from, and whether that awareness is something that you would connect to your time as a part of that growth that has happened here at Santa Cruz, or whether that comes from someplace else? I'm curious, as we're getting into a mode of core themes of what the impact of what this place has been on you.

Herz: So, in terms of recognizing my own privilege, it's the campus that has done that for me, purely. I did not recognize it when I was in Pleasanton at all. I mean, not in a bad way—I just didn't know, I wasn't exposed enough to the real world to realize. And then as I came here, we had a few trainings during Welcome Week and that was that. But I took a leadership class my spring quarter, because I'm an RA alternate, so I still have to do some of the trainings in case I

get thrown in. And one of the classes was about privilege, and how to recognize your own privilege and still be able to get involved in activism. Which I don't really, but in my case, if you wanted to get more involved in activism, how to go about that with so much privilege, because you can't really speak from your own experiences, because you don't really have any, as someone else in a minority would. I still remember that class, that one singular hour-and-a-half course. It really stuck with me in terms of really thinking about myself and how I fit into society and how I fit in compared to others, and recognizing that, to become more cognizant of other people and what they're going through and what their history is, and why everything happens, essentially.

Vanderscoff: So that's one area of change. And I don't know whether we've covered this already, but as we come to a conclusion here, are there any other ways in which you'd like to talk about Santa Cruz in terms of its impact on you? What do you think it's done for you as a distinct educational setting, as opposed to maybe schools where some of your friends might be going from high school—other UCs or CSUs, or wherever?

Herz: I think it helps me connect to other people, in terms of recognizing how my privilege compares with everybody else's, and in building that relationship, knowing everybody's from different backgrounds. But also, what I've heard, for example, just from other schools, is, like, Berkeley's incredibly stressful, because they grade on a curve, so you're competing with your classmates. Here, if you do a great job, you get the grade you earned. It doesn't matter if everybody else did a great job. One of my friends got a 96 percent on a test at Berkeley and got a D. Yeah, because everybody else got above a 96 percent. So, I think this place does a very good job on working with people building more meaningful connections to others, in terms of learning about everybody on a broader social standard. I think that's been a large, large takeaway for me, in building those connections for the future, for the professional future as well. I truly feel very comfortable in this place. I'm really grateful for, honestly, everything that

it's given. There's a lot of things that happen that I might not disagree with, but overall, I'm really happy with my life here.

Vanderscoff: And that process that you describe, this coming to an understanding about yourself, could you say a little bit about where you see that happening? Is that in the curriculum? Is that in the college? Is that in other social spaces? Is that in the landscape?

Herz: Social spaces. I count social spaces as anything where you're really communicating with people, not just sitting in a lecture hall, not talking the person next to you. I mean, like, maybe group projects. I'm not a fan of group projects all the time, but even then, you still build connections with those people. The people you live with, the people you work with, the people you work for. The teachers—those relationships— I think you see more of in a social setting where you're really trying to build a meaningful connection outside of the professional realm.

Vanderscoff: So, you're still in the earlier part of your education here. You're just starting your second year. Based on what's happened to you so far, when you look ahead, what are your plans? What do you see for yourself this year, next year? Let's project a little bit.

Herz: So, this year, a cool thing I actually forgot to mention—so I do improv on campus. I'm getting involved in that, and of course making meaningful connections through that as well. There we go [Laughs] I'm now working two jobs on campus, with the athletics department and the programs office at Cowell. I'm hoping to immerse myself more into the structure of the campus, essentially, and finding different spots in different places to learn from different experiences.

And then next year I'm going to study abroad for a year. First semester, I'm going to go to—this is most likely—of course, it's not official yet. But the plan is right now I'm going to Barcelona and Florence, a crossover for my first semester, and the second semester I'm going to Australia. I just want to see as much as I can. And then I'm probably going to do one more quarter my

fourth year, and then I'll be done. I'll have everything good. Maybe travel after that. But then apply to grad school for my master's in education and also a teacher's credential, because when I talk to teachers they say, "Get your master's right away. If you can, if you're able to get your master's right away, do that. Because if you wait then it's incredibly difficult, because now you have a job, maybe a family and kids and everything, so you have a lot more going on." So, I'm going to get my master's and credential together, likely here at Santa Cruz because there's a very, very good program here. It takes a year and a quarter and you're good to go and you've got everything. And my uncle, who works with a lot of teacher's assistants in the San Jose District, said the ones from Santa Cruz know their stuff a lot better than, like, for example, San Jose State, not to call anyone out, but that's the example he used. And, of course, I'll still apply elsewhere and really look around, but right now that's the most likely. I will end up back here.

And then after teaching somewhere. Somewhere. Who knows? I don't know where else after. Probably, California, because that's where my credentials will probably be ushering me towards. It's kind of a weird thing, depending on what credential you have, is different states, and some you can kind of go anywhere and others you can only go here. I have to learn more about that, but that's a little ways away. Well, closer than I think. But that's my plan. So far.

Vanderscoff: That's great. So that carries me through all of my questions, but before we close, is there anything else that you would like to say to wind us out? Anything we missed?

Herz: God, there's a lot that we went over, not that we missed. [Laughs] Whew! Let's see, I guess, to any incoming freshmen out there, take any opportunity you can, even if you're afraid of it, because honestly, that opportunity could completely change the course of your academic career. Like, for example, I applied to be a Welcome leader, which seemed like a small thing at first, and now I have a job from it that I will have for the rest of the year. So, no matter how small an opportunity may seem, take it. There we go. I felt like I should end on some sort of incredibly inspirational thing that someone will put on a wall.

Vanderscoff: You don't have to, but if you'd like to. [Laughing]

Herz: Go down in history! Anyway, [Laughing] I'm good.

Vanderscoff: Great! Well, fantastic. So, on my end, just thank you so much for making time for this, Tommy.

Herz: It went deep! There were some ideas that I really haven't talked about ever, especially when we went to privilege and political stuff.

Vanderscoff: Well, I learn something from every single oral history that I do, one way or another, and I always hope that people who I'm in the oral history experience with learn something there as well. So, thank you so much for your time, for your presence, for sharing your story.

Herz: Yeah, it was fun.

Vanderscoff: And all of your insights about this place.

Herz: Of course.

Vanderscoff: With that, we'll close out this record.

Herz: Boom.

Khalen Hudson

At the time of his interview, Khalen Hudson was a senior majoring in chemistry and biochemistry. He grew up in Southern California. Hudson was an active member of the College Nine community, serving as a residential assistant for three years and a mentor RA in 2016-17. He also was an active coordinator for the Student Initiated Outreach efforts for UCSC, specifically for Destination Higher Education, which focuses on African-American/Black students. While he was at UCSC, Hudson was a member of the African Black Student Alliance (ABSA), helped organize the Students of Color conference, taught the College Ten Social Justice issues course, and participated in the Intercultural Community Weekend. '

Vanderscoff: So today is Tuesday, April 11, 2017, and this is Cameron Vanderscoff here for the Student Interviews oral history project. I'm wondering if we could start out today, if you would just introduce yourself in whatever words you choose, and then just a little bit about where you're coming from.

Hudson: Okay. My name is Khalen Hudson. I am a fifth-year chemistry major. I'm affiliated with College Nine. I describe myself as an extroverted introvert. I come from Southern California, from Pomona, California. I went to high school down there, growing up around all of Southern California my whole life, so I came up here to get a new perspective and a new take and just to get out of So Cal.

Early Background

Vanderscoff: And so, leading into UCSC, I wonder if you could talk a little bit about your educational background. And that could be talking about you; that could be talking about your family values around this, pulling all of that in, looking towards why you then came here.

Hudson: Okay. Well, I'm the oldest of three siblings. So, coming to college was something that was always going to happen for me. My parents were always just like, "You're going to go to school," and I was like, "Okay, I'm going to go to school." So, I graduated with high school with the intention of going to college. Where was I going to go?

Destination Higher Education

Santa Cruz was not particularly on my radar until I came up on a program called Destination Higher Education, through the Student-Initiated Outreach Programs. And on that trip, I came up here; I met some friends. It was free, which was cool. The program, basically it outreaches to underrepresented cultures. So, there's DHE for the African American students. There's ORALE [Oportunidades Rumbo A La Educación] for Latino students, and then there's the FSF [A Step Forward] program for the Filipino-identifying students.[7] So it's a week and they bring us all up; it's free; it's two days, two nights. And it was really fun and I met some really cool people. And I was like, cool, I can go here.

Vanderscoff: So, what happened at that event, or didn't happen, or whatever it was that sent you towards this place?

Hudson: I think it was the people that I met. I met some really cool people that already went here. And I also met some cool people on the trip that said they were going to come here. And then just, I don't know. I think I was captivated by them and the community and also by the

[7] See http://admissions.ucsc.edu/visit/sio/index.html

campus. Because coming from Southern California, yeah, you get the beaches, but nothing like the forest. For a lot of people, that would scare them. But I really like nature and stuff like that. So yeah, I was like, this looks like something totally different. And I like change. So, I was like, this seems like a place for me. I knew I wanted to go somewhere in Northern California and I don't really like crowded city life. I liked how chill the campus was, and how isolated it was on the hill, so I could just get away from people and stay on campus, which was nice. So yeah, that mixture of the people; the black community here seemed pretty cool at the time, and then just the campus itself.

Vanderscoff: So, what was the cultural, or the natural, or the environmental difference in Northern California in general that you were trying to get to, as opposed to So Cal?

Hudson: Well, I didn't really know what I was trying to get to. I just knew I wanted to get to something different. It's nice to come up here and not have smog in the air. (laughs) And nice to see trees. I saw a deer for the first time. I'm like, oh, shit, it's a deer! So, yeah, it was really nothing, I just knew I wanted change because growing up in Southern California, my family moved around. I was always navigating Southern California. We have family in L.A.; we have family in San Diego; we have family all in between, so I've seen most of Southern California that I feel like I needed to see. So, I'm like, in college, when I can get away, why not? Because I'll probably end up residing back at home when I graduate. In my professional career, I'll probably go back home to Southern California. So, I'm like, let me try to experience things outside of that, so I'm not just stuck here my whole life.

College Nine

Vanderscoff: Okay. So, you do come up to Northern California. If you wouldn't mind just saying why College Nine and how that happened, and then your first impressions of this place, relative to home.

Hudson: Okay. So, College Nine was also because I met some people on the trip on DHE and they were all RAs at College Nine. And I was like, "Oh, you guys are really cool people." And they're like, "Yeah, come to College Nine. We could be your RA." And I was like, "Sure, cool, why not?" So, I applied to College Nine, but they weren't my RAs. But I was very involved with them; it was nice to see them in the community. There's thirteen RAs in College Nine and about four or five of them volunteered on the trip. So, it was pretty cool to see them when I moved in. And then, what was the second part of the question?

Vanderscoff: Your first impressions of this place coming here, relative to home.

Hudson: My first impression—I would say my real first impression was orientation. And I was just like, these people here are hella crazy. Because when you're in the orientation group, they're supposed to scream at you and stuff. And when you move into College Nine, they have this big pride on making people feel very welcome. So, they're also just screaming at you. I guess that's their definition of feeling welcome. They're like, "Yeah! Hurrah! Welcome!" and all this stuff. And yeah, it's nice, but it's also a little overwhelming. But it takes the edge away because they're being stupid, so things are less serious, which is nice, kind of.

Yeah, my first impression was just like, I'm going to be here for four years. And I was just like, I'm in the forest. I didn't really know what to think of it. It's just such a different place from home. That was pretty much all that I could think about. Eventually this ended up becoming my home, too. The people that I met made the transition seem pretty seamless, from home to Santa Cruz. Back at home is back at home. Santa Cruz is Santa Cruz, but it had the same homey vibe. So, the environment really didn't play a crazy, crazy impact on that.

Vanderscoff: So, if you think about some of your early educational experiences, like the core course, for example, or early GE's, what sort of introduction did that give you, or transition did that give you, to your education here?

Hudson: Well, College Nine, the theme is global international perspectives. And the only thing I could think about my core course was that we talked a lot about labor. We talked a lot about Walmart. So, I just came out of that thinking, Walmart's the worst thing on this planet. Because you come here and I didn't really know how heavy the theme would be played out throughout my whole four years. I didn't know if this was something that I'd be learning all the time, living at College Nine for the whole year, or if it was the core course, but the first quarter I was just like Walmart's the devil and labor and rights and stuff. But growing up black, you're not unfamiliar with identifying wrongdoings in the world, you know? So, thinking that way was nothing, I think, out of the ordinary. I was just like, now I just have something else to be on the radar for, something else to add to my laundry list of injustices in the world. Like, hurray. Congratulations.

Vanderscoff: And can you think of other places in those early classes where you were sensing intersections from your own family background and the educational material that you were seeing? Again, as a way of thinking about home and then here, adjusting to here.

Hudson: Well, growing up, I had a pretty diverse childhood, I would say. My dad is the youngest of nine children. And each of those aunties and uncles—they're totally different people. So, like I said, I'm black and I come from an African American family. But growing up, my dad listened to jazz. The music and the cultural exposures when I was little were very broad and very diverse, which allowed me to grow appreciating different things. My dad was into jazz, or into rap, or whatever. Then I had an aunty that was into seventies and eighties rock and hair bands, and we would watch VH1, *I Love the '80s*, and stuff like that. And then she was also into theater, so we'd watch a lot of Fred Astaire movies and stuff like that. So, I was always growing up with a lot of things. And you're young, so you don't control what you do around you. So that was my upbringing. I feel like it was very beneficial when I came to Santa Cruz because I was able to be a more well-rounded person [with that] view of life. Because I also grew up playing sports but my sisters grew up dancing. So, I'd been in the sports world as well

and the arts world. So, growing up, it was just weird. I grew up [in a way] not a lot of people get.

So, coming up to Santa Cruz, my first year, I can't really say that anything was crazy. Because I'm a chemistry major, so most of my classes were science and science is science. There's really no room for identity, or talking about oneself, or anything like that. So, there was really no shifting with personality, or conflicts with intersections or anything. Besides, I was one of the few black kids in the class. But growing up that's always the case when you don't grow up in a predominantly black neighborhood, which I didn't. So that was not anything super crazy.

My Writing 2 was about food. That was a great class. I love food. But nothing really ever made me, class-wise or curriculum-wise, really made me think about my intersection, until later on in college I became an RA. And I started taking more—like last quarter I took an acting class. So, you learn more about different disciplines and stuff, which is pretty cool. Because I saved a lot of my GEs until the end, so I've been able to explore through those a little bit more.

Vanderscoff: That's an interesting approach. What seemed to distinguish, if anything, College Nine, in particular, as an environment? And that can be social, or that can be educational.

Hudson: Well, I picked College Nine for basically only two reasons. One, because it was new. 'It was the newer out of the colleges. And then two, it was because of the friends that I met on DHE. And that was literally the only two factors. I didn't know anything about the theme. First, I was going to choose College Eight because it had more environmental, sciencey theme. But then I met my friends on this trip and then I was like no, I'm going to live there because they're cool people, the RAs—there's familiar faces to go around, and I wouldn't be totally on my own. So those were the two biggest factors in contributing to why I chose College Nine. I didn't know anything about College Nine. I did not even think that I would be as involved as I am in College Nine right now. But yeah, things just happened.

Vanderscoff: So that's a story that came later, then, you getting more involved with that.

Hudson: Yeah.

Majoring in Chemistry

Vanderscoff: So that's something that we will loop around to. So, as you're starting to adjust to this place, where does your major come from in particular, chemistry and biochem? If you can chart how you came to that particular part of sciences?

Hudson: I started out as a human bio major. Yeah. This is, yeah, this is a story—I started out as a human bio major. And it was cool. Like Spanish was cool. The bio was cool. But I'm really indecisive. That's one thing; I'm very indecisive. So, I was like, I'm a human bio major, but I was always open for something else to come along and take it. So, I guess I wasn't really committed. But in high school, I knew I didn't like history and I didn't like English. I didn't like the social sciences. But I did really like math. And in my senior year I took an anatomy class, and I was like, this is great. And I was like bio, anatomy: it's cool, same difference.

And then I realized going through college, that it wasn't the same difference. You take one anatomy course when you're in the bio and the rest is super cell, molecular level based. I was like, it's interesting. So, it was just BS my way through the classes through three years. And then the winter quarter of my third year, I was taking classes. And my interest just wasn't growing with the difficulty of the subject. So, throughout college, I was like, maybe I'll do bio. And then I was like, I really like math. Maybe I'll do math. But then I talked to some of my friends that are math majors and I was like yeah, no, that's not for me.

Then I was like, maybe I'll switch to creative writing, because I took that food class and it was really, really fun. I really enjoyed writing. But I don't like reading. In order to write, you probably have to do some reading. And I was like no, that's not for me. (laughs)

And then I was going through the classes. I have a med school route in my head. So, you have to take chemistry classes as well, when you're a bio major. And you have to take O-chem series. And I really, really enjoyed the O-chem series. And I was doing better in my chem classes than I was in my bio classes. But I didn't think anything of that at the time. I was just like, you know, I don't know, it's just that. But then I reached this one class, molecular bio; it was like three units. And she was like, "You're going to have a test every other week," like five tests, whatever. And I was just like yeah, no. I'd reached my limit. So, then I just dropped out of that class. And I was like, I'm going to change my major. But I don't really like anything else besides chemistry, because I looked back in retrospect. I'd been liking these classes; the professor's better. And it has more math involved in it than biology. And I just realized that I just don't like the mundane types of memorization. It's just not for me. I like applying formulas and my brain just thinks more in math ways. So, chemistry was kind of the best of both worlds.

So, then I went to chemistry. And now, that's why I'm a fifth-year, because I switched my major in my third year. At first, I had some hesitations, but I was just like all right, I'd rather stay an extra year in college, which is pretty cool, than live a life that I hate. So, yeah. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: (laughs) Yeah. That is better—I'm curious, so within chem and biochem, if you can chart key growth moments that confirmed for you: oh, I made the right decision, I'm sticking with this thing—

Hudson: I would say the O-chem series was the first, especially the second part, 108B was the class that really challenged me a lot. But I was really able to put in the work in order to pass the class, I guess. Those were the first classes I started going to office hours for, and actually not procrastinating, and studying for. And actually, doing the homework many times, really studying. It was interesting because I was doing the work, but it didn't feel like work, because I was interested in it. So, it didn't feel as much as a mundane task as, oh, I have to do my bio homework. I'm like, oh, I've got to do chem homework, but it's nothing that I wouldn't want to

do. Because it's cool to learn about chem. And then it just kept on getting reinforced. And my junior year, when I took the P-chem series, it was pretty hard. But I was really willing to study and my passion for the subject was growing with the difficulty of the subject, which was good, because I was willing to put in more hours to understand the more difficult topics. And that's when I knew this is pretty cool.

Vanderscoff: And beyond that, do you relate that to the subject matter? Do you relate that to the teachers? What has been that sort of entrée into, more engagement or more spark with the material for you?

Hudson: I would say both the subjects and the teachers. I've never really liked any of my bio teachers but I've liked almost all my chem teachers. So that was one thing. I was just like, chemists are just better people than biologists. (laughter) The chem teachers were just more committed to the students than the bio faculty. Why? I don't know. I just felt they knew their subjects were hard and they weren't out to get you. The bio teachers were not out there to make you fail, but also just not putting all their effort into allowing you to pass. I realized when I took 108B, I really appreciated my teacher, Professor Bakthan [Singaram], because he had office hours almost every day. And then, when he didn't have office hours, he was in the library; he was walking around seeing if people in his class needed help. He's really committed to his students. It made me feel more obligated to being committed to his class. I was like, if he's this committed to me, then I have to at least do really good in the class. Because [otherwise] all your efforts are going nowhere.

But yeah, and then just the subject matter. I was tired of learning about inside the cell. I like more of the body, and the motion, and the anatomy part of it, not the molecular. I was so tired of learning about mitosis so many times and cell division, and all the change and all the cycles. And I was just like, I don't really care. Because I'm like, it's like, cool, it's in the cell. Yeah, I should know DNA replicates and stuff, and all the enzymes. It's cool. I don't really care.

Someone will care—I don't have to, it's fine. Honestly, what got me into chemistry was the math. Chemistry was more math-based; it was more math-intensive. I'm a more logical person, so I like when things make sense. I just don't like to know things just to know it. For me, biology was just like—like I hate flashcards. Sitting down looking at flashcards is such a mundane task. And I'm not really getting anything out of this but just memorizing. I'm going to forget it the next quarter. So that's why I chose chemistry. It's something that was more solid and concrete, and more in tune with the way my mind thinks.

Vanderscoff: You know, and so this next question, I think it's something that maybe we are less conscious of, or I was less conscious of, certainly, when I went through undergrad. But historically speaking, we're at a moment where the role of online learning is getting larger and larger. So, I'm curious about where your education has been occurring. To what extent is this happening online? To what extent is this happening in laboratory settings? To what extent is this happening strictly in classroom settings? I mean, what are the venues of your education, and what sort of a difference does that make in terms of your particular subject material in chem?

Hudson: Well, Kahn Academy is really good.[8] But mostly, most of the time it's the teachers, and then office hours. And if the TA is good, then it's also the TA in section. Because the teachers write the test and the overall goal is to learn, yeah, but the overall, overall goal is to pass the class, which means you have to do good on the test. So, the teachers, like their office hours, have been probably the most helpful because they just have a better insight on what they're teaching. Because within a class, there's so many ways to teach it and so many different topics that you can cover. But then, depending on the teacher you have and their interests, that's what they're going to harp on a little more. So, they know what they know, and they know what they're teaching the class on, obviously. So, going to them has been the most helpful. And then, if

[8] https://www.khanacademy.org/math

something still is [difficult], I'd go in the textbook. But most of the time I will see if it's online. But getting in the upper, upper divisions, it's kind of hard to find stuff online. It's hard to find videos and stuff, the fun stuff you want to watch. So, it's more intense, like reading. But some people do a really good job of just explaining it in a different way than the teachers, just make it a little bit better. But most of the time I would say, it's either office hours, or just struggling with friends, trying to figure it out until someone has an ah-ha moment, they can explain it in stupid terms for us so we can understand.

Vanderscoff: That actually leads me into another question, which is what have you found the function of peer learning, or peer support, to be in your studies?

Hudson: Oh, everything, everything. Even in biology and in chemistry, I started off in the ACE program. And the ACE program is extra tutoring in the STEM fields. They don't hold them for the upper divs, unfortunately. But mostly intro, freshman, the sophomore math and chem and a couple bio courses—it's small group tutoring but in a bigger commitment. So, it was two times a week and, I would say, sections of about thirty. And they would have people come and lead the sections. They would be like another TA, basically. But it was ACE. And ACE was—they're kind of like a TA on steroids, I would say. You met twice a week for an 1:30 or an 1:45. They would either do mini lectures, or give you worksheets, or they would help you with the homework. But it mostly focused on group work, so they would give you a problem or something and you would have tables in your groups, and you're working in your groups. And from there, I made a lot of friends that have followed me through the bio, when I was in the bio. But then a couple of other of them also followed me through the chem. So, it was nice to find them and have friends. And it's just cool, because your friends have friends. And you might not know it, but they might know it, or their friends might know it. And then you get old tests from friends of friends and stuff like that. So, yeah, friends have been—and it's also nice to struggle with someone else.

Grading

Vanderscoff: One thing, and the answer to this may be no, but what sort of role have—and this would be GEs actually and in your major—have narrative evaluations played in terms of how you're assessed? Because this campus, when I was here, still had narrative evaluations, written narrative evaluations, until the end of my junior year, basically. And so, one question for this project is whether those are still around, whether any faculty are still doing them in any of your studies.

Hudson: No, not at all. No, no. I would say the most unusual gradings that I've got have been the writing classes that I've taken. And it's kind of like you don't know your grades until the end because the teachers don't really grade the papers. They're kind of just like, yeah, it was a good paper. But you're like, what did I get? And they're just like, oh, I don't know. So, you end up not really knowing what your grade was until the end. I guess that's the closest thing to a narrative evaluation, but it's not even close at all. So, I've never been evaluated. No, it's always the test, basically.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, so then when it comes to your grades, so obviously grades give you something when you're in high school. What have you found out of that in terms of college? I mean, you're in a quantitative field, right, so grades might tell you a lot, maybe more than they might tell you in a writing setting. But I'm just curious about any thoughts you might have about that.

Hudson: Well, in college, if you're trying to proceed to something beyond college, then grades are like they were in high school. They're pretty stressful. But I don't know. Grades are cool, but they're not everything. I'm really not a big proponent for standardized testing. I feel like it really limits your learning. And like I said before, your ultimate goal is to pass the class. You might just only understand what you need to understand for the test and not really anything

beyond it. Especially when you're taking many classes at once, it's kind of just like I'm just here to pass the class; I'm not here to really learn. Let me just get out.

I've also met a lot of people that just are not good test takers. You grow up and you learn about test taking anxiety and mental health issues. And there's a lot of things, especially in college, like learning about yourself and about others as a person that could factor into your academics that are not always telling in your grades. I have a lot of friends that don't have the best grades but they're great people. I feel like they should get into any school they wanted to because they have so many outside experiences besides grades. Grades don't really tell you life experiences.

Vanderscoff: You started to answer this question, but how have you seen that play out in terms of that peer support group that you're talking about? Those different relationships to grades, and then how grades are assessed in the first place.

Hudson: I don't know. We just, so we'll take a test; we'll get some grades, and some people will be really, really disappointed and some people will be really, really happy. And everyone comes from such a different background and then from those backgrounds come different educational systems. The people that obviously have had more privilege throughout their lives know so many things. I remember coming to the intro classes, and I'm just like, how do these kids know this? Was this something I was supposed to know from high school? The school they went to was really good, or they were able to afford tutoring and stuff. So, that [should be taken] into account when we talk about school and grading. And yeah, it's cool to work hard. But it's also a thing to just have those resources readily available to you, so you don't have to work as hard. We come in and we're not all on an equal playing field, basically. And the teachers kind of assume, I guess, especially in the sciences, because you're supposed to know science—this is what you want to do, so you should know it. But not a lot of people know that. Not a lot of educational systems are able to feed into that wanting to know a lot of stuff.

But I would say with grades and friends, I've never had a friend really, really fail a class like that. We're always worried if we're going to pass. But it's like the thrill of college, I guess, and the thrill of being in the STEM fields. I would just say, thank God for the curve. If we all fail, then we all pass. (laughs) So that's the mentality that a lot of us have. And if we don't do as well, we have each other to pick each other up. And we just know that school is school at the end of the day. It's not life or death. But it does feel like that sometimes. And it's hard to get yourself out of that mindset sometimes. But when you have good friends, it works out pretty well.

Vanderscoff: And so, with this uneven playing field, where do you situate yourself on that in terms of your arrival to Santa Cruz? And then how have you navigated that sense?

Hudson: I went to two high schools. I went to one that was in a predominantly wealthy area. But I didn't like it. So, then I went back to my neighborhood, which was more, I would say, lower income—most of the kids got a free lunch and stuff. And the education there, at the end of the day, it was up to me how much I wanted to put an effort into high school. But I do feel like it was easier to pass the classes. Some teachers were really challenging, some teachers were not. But I don't know, because I did go to that high school. So, I don't really know if I could have learned more. But then I come here and people do know more. And I'm just like, I don't know how this happened. If you're just generally more interested, you had more resources at your school if you were interested, or if you were tutored on the outside. I'm always just like, where are these kids coming out hell of smart from? And people are just like, "Yeah, I took all these AP classes. I took physics and different electives at my school." And I'm like, "Oh, we didn't have that at my school." So, it's just like, oh.

So, I wouldn't say that I was super on the low side, but I also wasn't on the high side of life, coming out of super good academic advantage.

Vanderscoff: So, you've talked about this I guess in terms of your friends, and your coursework, and some helpful professors. But including those and anything else we haven't discussed yet, what have been the key resources for you in navigating from that point of entry to where you're at now in your course of study?

Hudson: Well my freshman and sophomore year, it was definitely the ACE program. Because I was also one of those high school students that didn't really have to study to do good in high school. So, I came to college with terrible study habits. So, I was like, what is doing work? My plan was to procrastinate and I would do great. So, it was like, cool. But then I came to ACE and I'm like, "It's college. I should take it more seriously." And they got me more into studying because basically if you didn't go, you'd get kicked out. There were four study groups for me to go to twice a week. So sometimes they would offer it for all my classes each quarter, or one or two. So, I'd be in Baskin sometimes for hours on end, or many times a week. But it was good, because it got me into a good transition, into college and into studying. And into, I don't know, just into wanting to do good in school, I guess. And I met a lot of like-minded people.

And the ACE program—I wouldn't say it reaches out towards people of different ethnic backgrounds but it does really foster that community. Like a lot of diversity. They reach in for diversity within the STEM fields. So, I appreciate them a lot. And then when I didn't have them, it was pretty bad. Because I missed having someone to force me to study. So, then my junior year, I really had to—

Vanderscoff: So that was a two-year involvement. That's how that operates?

Hudson: Yeah, because it just depends on the classes they cover. So, they covered most of the gen chem and they covered through the O-chem. They were more chemistry-based. And then they also did a couple of the bios. I think they did Bio 20A and 20B, when I took bio. And then after the O-chem, those bios, I think they might have had genetics or something like that. But not, they don't really get into the upper divs. It's mostly the intro classes.

I really liked my ACE instructors for chemistry and stuff. So, it was pretty good. And then when I left, it was a struggle because I was like, I don't know how to study, blah, blah, blah. But then it was also, now that I look back, I wasn't really interested in the bio, so I didn't want to do it really anyways. Looking back, I was always studying for the chem classes because I actually liked it and I was putting work into it. And at first, I thought it was just because it was harder and I needed to work harder to pass it. But then I realized that I just enjoyed it more. That's why I would study it more than the bio classes. I would also get by passing the bio classes with minimum effort. But I was like, that's not really good. Because you shouldn't just want to get Cs to graduate. So yeah. But then being with friends that really like to study, or like not really like to study, because a lot of my friends like to like party and stuff, too. (laughter) But you know, when shit gets real, like it's real. So just keep me accountable. I've met some people in the STEM field that just really keep you accountable: we have to do work. Sometimes we end up goofing off half the time and then doing work. But you know, the intentions are there.

Students of Color in the Sciences

So then from there, it's just, yeah, going to office hours and stuff. And just making friends with those office hour groups. And then you end up studying on the outside together. And it's cool. And it's always cool because I always end up making friends with most of the minorities in the class. So, we're kind of in it together, and that's cool.

Vanderscoff: And so, you find that within the STEM class, as well, that you and students of color are like—so when it comes to your peer networks, is that an important part of what you're talking about?

Hudson: I would definitely say so, yes. Just because a lot of them come from similar backgrounds, similar life experiences. There are not many black people in the chemistry field. I'm the only one graduating this year, I think, in the chemistry field. And there's been a couple that I've known before. Last year, a couple graduated. And the year before that, a couple

graduated. So, they were kind of like, my "mentors." And they were always super smart, in labs, in their studies, really doing it. So that's cool. But then in the classes, I would normally always just naturally just end up linking up with the people that came from ACE that were studying the chemistry field, that were a lot of people of color. And from there, I would just seem to connect with the other people of color that were really involved. In office hours and stuff like that, we'd just all end up just, I don't know, hanging out and stuff, and studying.

Vanderscoff: And so you mentioned out earlier in the conversation that when you started out in these classes, that these aren't places where there are conversations happening about intersectionality, right? (laughter)

Hudson: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: And maybe this actually is a way to connect them to some of the other involvements that you've had in terms of social and residential and advocacy issues on campus. But just to stay with the major for a second, if you could comment a little bit, if this wasn't something that was being brought up in class, then saying a little bit more about how those connections were being formed, and how you were developing that consciousness about the intersection of race and then the sciences, being a black man in the sciences.

Hudson: I think this happened kind of naturally. I don't know, just like in life you tend to gel with like-minded people. And then normally if you come from the same background, or the same type of background, then you're more likely to be like-minded than people that haven't. So, it kind of just happens naturally. Just start talking, or you just make friends. I don't know, it just happens that way. I'm not saying that we have no white friends, like inner-city groups or things like that. (laughter) But the majority of us are just always, I don't know, I just felt like it was kind of a silent, "Hey, I see you. You see me and that's cool." Your professors are white, and your faculty seems always white, and the majority of the people in the class seem like they're white. And it's just like the little bit of us can just be like, hey. If you're a person that

acknowledges that, then that nod is that thing of like, hey, I've got you. My mentors are like, hey, you got this, because you have to, because we're all in this together. So, it's stuff like that.

Vanderscoff: It's the recognition.

Hudson: Yeah, it's the recognition.

Vanderscoff: So, unless there's anything else you'd like to say about your major for now—

Hudson: Well, chemistry's cool, yeah.

Residential Assistant at College Nine

Vanderscoff: (laughs) So then moving into the area of college or advocacy or activist involvement, one place to start there is starting out as an RA. You mentioned that that changed your engagement in the College Nine community. So, could you just say how you became an RA, what your intentions were in doing that, and then what the reality kind of became?

Hudson: Yeah. Well, if you know anything about the RA job, you know we've got some pretty good perks. We get free housing and we get a free meal plan. And like I said, when I first came up on the program, I met a lot of friends that were RAs. And then through those years, our relationships became closer. And then I became pretty close with my own RA. And then it was just something that I knew that I would be good at. And I also really would like free housing and a free meal plan, because coming from a lower income, I was taking out all the loans that I could. And this would really take a big chunk out of what I would have to pay later.

So, my freshman year, of course I wasn't an RA then. But my sophomore year, I moved off campus with my friends because I was like, I don't want to be on campus all my life. I would like to experience something new. Then I came back as an RA for my third year. I was an RA for freshmen. And a lot of my friend group already were RAs, because, I don't know, it just happened to work out like that. So, I was friends with a lot of the staff when I came onto the

staff. So that was cool. And then I was an RA last year, my fourth year, in the apartments. And I'm a fifth year, and this is my third year being an RA, and I'm back in the dorms. It's been fun. Freshmen are way better than having continuing students, in my opinion, because continuing students are pretty boring. They think they know it all and stuff. So, it's fun, they don't talk to you—it's fine. But the freshmen, I don't know, it's just really cool to be able to basically dictate the way someone's college is going to go. Because your freshman year, I would say, is the most impactful. The way your freshman year goes, pretty much dictates the way your college is going to go. If you have a great freshman year, you make a lot of friends, you have people to live with off campus after, you make friends in your major. If you hate your freshman year, if you hate your floor, then you're feeling isolated. Then you don't know how you feel about the school. It just like snowballs. That can be a really great snowball, or a really bad snowball. So, I like to create a pretty good snowball for my residents, I would like to say. And just having a community on my floor that feels pretty safe, but also pretty comfortable.

And you know, it's college. I'm a pretty unconventional RA because as a black man, authority has always been a weird paradigm growing up. Like with the cops and stuff, and I just always knew, even with teachers, I just grew up not ever really liking the power trip that authority tends to have, just because they're authority. So [I thought] if I was a freshman, would I like myself [as an RA], basically. And that has built up a lot of community, I would say, on my floors, and allowed me to have a good relationship with the people on my floor.

Vanderscoff: Okay, so I was an RA for a few years. So, if you think about the different parts of the job, there's that policy aspect, right?

Hudson: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: And you sort of articulated your philosophy about that. And then two of the other main areas would be programming, and then an overlapping area, which is support, including when it comes to questions of health, be that physical or be that mental or whatever.

Hudson: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: So, could you talk about some of those other areas of the job, and your feelings about them, but relating that to your own experience as a student here.

Hudson: I hate programming. (laughs) As an RA, as a first-year RA, I came in all wide-eyed and bushy-tailed, like we all do. I was like, "Cool, I'm going to make some programs." But the thing is, I hate the bullshit, basically. I don't like to do things just because you have to do them. I'm like, if I have to do them, they might as well be good. So, I don't like to throw programs just to be like, okay, I checked a program off the list. I would want to do things that people would actually want to come to and something that they'd actually learn from. So, me and my friend were in San Jose and we ran into this sexual awareness carnival. And one of the things we had to do was, they put the drunk goggles on us. We had to go through an obstacle course to simulate drinking and driving. And I was like, oh, this is pretty fun, but also, this was really hard. I would never drink and drive because this is horrible.

So, I go to my boss and I'm like, "Hey, I want to do this." And she actually was like, "You can't because research shows that drunk goggles actually make more light of the situation than they do." I kind of disagreed, but I was like, you know, that's fine. And that narrative of me wanting to do something a little bit more risqué, I would say, and then getting shut down, kind of depleted my drive for programs**.** So, at the end of the quarter, I would just buy them snacks for finals week and stuff. It was like, cool, I'll support them that way. But in terms of programs, we don't get a good enough budget. And my first year, I had a really big floor, one of the biggest floors. And my budget, I had 150 dollars to spend on the quarter for almost 60 students. That's not a good ratio. So, I'll be doing bullshit programs, like let's like decorate cookies, or do bowling with water bottles. Or something people don't really want to do. I'll just be there at the program by myself with the snacks. So, it's just like, it worked for me, but not really what the floor wants to do. They would always be like, "Let's do something." And I'd be like, "What you

want to do?" And it would always be something extravagant, like let's go paintballing, or let's go rowing, or let's go do something. And I'm just like, "I don't have the budget. So, I don't know what to do but to buy you guys snacks when you guys need to study and stuff."

So, my thoughts about programming are just like, they don't want you to do one big one. They want you to do many small ones. If I had more money, I would love programming. And if I could actually truly be creative and not have any limitations on the programs, then I would also really like programming. Yeah, I just feel like they're really fake and really forced when you just have to say, "Okay, guys, I have to do my job so please come out because I have to do this," instead of like, "Hey, this will be really fun and I think we would all like it."

But yeah, programming, my boss also knows that I'm really bad at programming. Because I feel the point of programming is to build community. But if I'm already doing that in alternative ways, then the purpose is already met. So, it's kind of redundant just to do things just to be doing them. Because they don't turn out. It's like students are, yeah, I had a program where three people showed up. And I'm just like, that's stupid. It's just a waste of everyone's time. And they're always just like, yeah, but the people that went there were really impacted and stuff. So, I try to think of thoughtful ways. This quarter we're going to do tie-dye and stuff, which I spent most of my budget on and my boss is kind of mad. But hey, it's fine. And since I've been here, they've kind of revamped the programming model because they know you have an influx of students, and they know that we have to keep the budget the same. So, they allow more spontaneous social interactions because they do now realize that the point of programs is just to build community. So, they just realize if a bunch of kids end up hanging out in your room one night, you can count it as a program, because your job is being done.

And I'm very into that. I'm just very into spontaneous, go with the flow, not force things. Because I just don't really like the idea of being forced. It's just too fake for me. I just can't. I just can't. So normally, my floors end up having a lot of that stuff. Because I'll just be in the hallway

and someone will come and we'll all just kind of be in the hallway. Or we'll all, I don't know, sit in my room, watch a movie or something like that. So, stuff like that happens a lot in my floors, which is pretty cool. So, it does its job. This one girl came to me and her eyes are very red. She said, "My boyfriend just came in both of my eyes." And I was just like, whoa! We are there. I didn't know that we were there. But you know we're there. I'm happy that we are, I guess. And I'm just wow—I'm really good at my job. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: Was she coming to you for support about this? Or she was okay?

Hudson: Well, she was just walking and she asked me, "Do you have eye drops?" And I was like, "Yeah, I do, but I need to know why I'm giving you eye drops. I need to know if you're okay. And then her boyfriend was behind her. He's just like, "I'm sorry." Then I made a joke to him. I was like, "Not one, but two? Are you serious?" And that's just one example of the type of weirdly, oddly close relationship that I have on my floor. They feel safe to come to me, which is what my job should be.

Vanderscoff: Mm hmm. And before we move on to some of your other things, so what you're talking about then is some sort of a model where people feel open coming to you about whatever it is they're going through. So, without using names or identifying details, are there situations where shit's gone down—this could be around mental health, or this could be around safety or anything like that—where you see the flipside of the payout of that? If you could just say a little bit more about where you see the ultimate benefit of this approach—

Hudson: Yeah. It's actually very funny, because I literally this weekend, right now I'm dealing with a sexual harassment case on my floor, where a student was sexually harassed by another resident on my floor, actually. And she texted me and was just like, "Hey, can I come talk to you?" I get a lot of those random texts: "Hey, can I come, can you come talk with me?" And it's either roommate problems—one was I want to move out of my room. And then I'm like, okay, but then one of them ends up not moving out. It was just a weird situation that. I get a lot of

stuff like, one of my friends has a really crazy girlfriend. And he just always comes to me and talks to me about that. more than the superficial. If they're actually having problems with their safety or their mental health, then they could come to me.

Vanderscoff: So that's great. You've carried this through into your role as, you're now a mentor RA, I understand.

Hudson: Yes, I am.

Vanderscoff: Which means third year, I suppose? Or what is that?

Hudson: Well, yeah. In College Nine, you can only, in College Nine they eliminate the third-year RA position because they knew a lot of RAs got burned out their third year and stuff. Which is like, rightfully so. So, if you're a third-year RA, the only position you could go would be a mentor RA. Which is you're kind of like your CRE's right-hand man. You can run meetings if they're late, or basically you're the second in command, to your staff. It really has nothing to do with your residents. It's more like the way your staff sees you, and the responsibility in that role. So, I applied for it. I got it. And, yeah. It's working out pretty well. I really like my boss. He's really cool. I like my staff this year. They're really cool.

Student-Taught Courses

Vanderscoff: So, you're involved in teaching a particular course. Could you say what that course is, and a little bit about how you got involved in that? And I have some follow-ups on that.

Hudson: Okay. So, College Nine and College Ten offer a student-taught course every winter quarter.[9] College Nine's is around the College Nine theme of global international perspectives.

[9] See also Regional History Project oral histories with Deana Slater and Wendy Baxter about Colleges Nine and Ten at : https://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/collegenineandten

And then College Ten's is around the social justice theme. And within those themes, there's a broad theme that they want to cover throughout. The class I taught, the theme was educational inequity. And I actually didn't do the College Nine class. I did the College Ten class, just because I really like change; it's something that probably come up a lot in this. And I just thought my narrative would be better teaching the College Ten class than the College Nine class. I took the College Nine class when I was a freshman, and I didn't get much out of it. I would just be able to be more passionate on the College Ten issues.

Also, as an RA, you do RA trainings over the summer. And a lot of the trainings, a lot of the pro staff, they do the trainings with you. And I got really close to the advisor of the co-curricular program. Her name is Wendy [Baxter]. She's cool. And she's the advisor of the College Ten class, the student class. So, she reached out to me. She was like, "You should really apply. I think you should do it." At first, I wasn't going to, because I'm like, I have so much to do this quarter. But then I ended up not having much to do that quarter. So, I was like, why not? So, I applied and I got it. Those are the reasons why I taught at College Ten.

I'd never taught in a setting like that. And you teach it with a co-teacher. So, my co-teacher's also really cool. But we don't take ourselves—the aspect of authority again, we don't take ourselves that serious. So, the class is two units to take and it's five units for us to teach. So, you have to assign two assignments, basically, for the quarter. And when we assigned the assignments, they actually really did them, and did them really well. We were super surprised. Because they take us seriously as figures and teachers, and we don't do that to ourselves. It was a weird dynamic. But the class was really good learning experience for us to learn as a teacher. Big props to all the teachers out there, because they deal with a lot of stuff.

It was cool. Each week had a theme. So, one week was Islamophobia. One week would be police brutality. One week was food justice. One week was educational inequity. And basically, the class, we like to make the rubber meet the road. So, our class of social justice, this year the

theme was educational inequity, so we reached out to this school called Gault Elementary School in Santa Cruz. And they harbor and foster most of the undocumented students and children in Santa Cruz. A lot of their parents are migrant workers and stuff. So, they cater to a lot of that community. So, we asked, "What do you guys need?" And they were like, "Oh, we need books for our library." So, there's basically four classes that make up the one big class. So, each teacher, each set of teachers teaches a class, but then we all come together for this final project. And there was a final fundraiser, and we ended up raising around two thousand dollars for the school's library. So, we got to go meet with them and meet the kids and stuff. And it was really cool. Yeah, the class was fun to teach. And it was fun to learn about things that you don't know as much about, but you have to kind of know about them when you teach. But it was also just cool, being vulnerable in the class. And a lot of your students also teach you some stuff, too.

And my role as an RA, a lot of intersections happened in that class. My role as an RA had to come in because one of my students actually was suicidal at one point. And she confided to me that she was suicidal. And then being a black male was also really prevalent in that class, because we talked a lot about stuff like that. So that was cool.

My teacher, she's Indian, queer, but she identifies as female. So, our dynamic was really cool. We had a wide range of knowledge in the class. It was cool. It was twenty students. We met once a week to teach and then we met once a week for Wednesday night sections. And we talked about the presenter that would come and present more in-depth on the topic we had taught the day before. So, it was cool.

Vanderscoff: I'm wondering if you could say a little bit more about how your own relationship to or understanding of the subject material that you were covering changed by virtue of, instead of being a student of that material, being an educator, a conveyor, a communicator of that material.

Hudson: Yeah. It really makes you think because you have to be able to convey it in a way that people can understand. But it was pretty cool because a lot of our people in our class, they surprised us. They were more "woke" than we thought. 'Stories speak volumes. But that's another thing. It's really weird because a lot of people like to tell stories, but a lot of people don't like to actually listen to the stories that people tell. But in our class, stories were very personal; first-hand accounts were very important. Because it's easier to tell someone—they believe something that you actually lived than bring up like a hypothetical example. So, it was cool, knowing when to step up, but also step back on like different issues, or let my co take over. There'd be some classes where I'd just let her go, and there would be some classes where she would just let me go. It was cool, because I'd be sharing stories about my blackness and stuff. Other people would share stories about their interaction with the black community, or their interactions within their community. It was a nice growing experience, learning about ourselves with each other.

Vanderscoff: And as far as then taking it back to other parts of your UCSC experience, is there something that that teaching experience, does any of that relate back to your work in your major, or to other areas of your educational experience? Or do those things feel like they're kind of separate in some way? I'm curious about the different parts.

Diversity in the Sciences

Hudson: Yeah. I would say it's actually very weird, because my major, my school life, and my school social life are very different. Chemistry is just all particles and stuff. We don't really deal with people. Not really. Which is weird. The sciences are lacking diversity. And I feel like it is for that reason, because we don't really talk about ourselves, or talk about identities and stuff in science. Because a lot of science is cut and dried, not much interpretation. We could all use a diversity course in the sciences and it would do us all pretty good.

Vanderscoff: What would that do, do you think?

Hudson: It would make people more empathetic towards the groups that they could be possibly impacting in their fields. Like if you do research and stuff, or just like working with—because there's not a lot of people of color in the field. But I do know that people of color in the field do feel like they're outsiders and they don't belong, just because the people they work with are predominantly white, and don't really know, have never really interacted with people of color. So, this comes across with micro-aggressions and stuff like that. Scientists are not well-rounded at all as humans. We're just into science. I don't know, they just think they're so smart and stuff in the sciences. And that's true. But socially, they're not that great of people. Because the science field, you normally interact with who's in your field. And if the science field is predominantly a white male field, then that's pretty much the only narrative you're going to get until you reach someone else. But then once that happens, you might not interact with them. So, it's kind of iffy. And I just feel like more diversity, no one would be hurt from it.

Vanderscoff: So, you're talking less, in that sense then, about the content itself than you are about the environment--

Hudson: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: —in which that content is learned. And then access to that environment in the first place.

Hudson: Yeah. Because science is pretty cut and dry. There's only debate when you start talking about evolution and stuff like that, in the more biological sciences, where you start getting into sex and gender and stuff like that. But in chemistry, which is really just more particles and atoms and electrons and stuff like that, there's really—chemistry has no race. So, these topics don't ever have to come up, if you don't want them to. I had a teacher last quarter that was very vocal on Trump because it was a chemistry class and we started learning about global warming. So that came up a little bit. And also, just Trump's whole anti-science regime. He's been attacking a lot of scientists lately. So, it's been interesting, people noticing about that.

But they will never talk about anything else about Trump being bad. They only talk about the way it impacts the science community.

Working with Destination Higher Education

Vanderscoff: And that's something I'd like to loop back into, how some of those larger domestic and international events have impacted things at UCSC. Just staying with the theme, in case we've missed something, have you continued your involvement with DHE?

Hudson: Oh, yes.

Vanderscoff: And then if you could speak to that.

Hudson: Yeah. So, I came up my freshman year. And then my sophomore year, my junior year, and maybe my senior year. I've been a bus chaperone. So basically, what happens is the program reaches out to the underrepresented groups from Northern California and Southern California that have already been accepted to Santa Cruz. So, they come up and visit. And then from Southern California, they come up on buses. And from Northern California, they also come up on buses. So, they need a bus chaperone for each group of kids. You can't just send a bus down and just bring kids up without anyone from the university. That's kind of sketchy. It's like, "Hey, you guys we're going to take you all up here with no one." So, the bus chaperones go and they collect the waivers and stuff. And they try to get things going on the bus, like talking and stuff. So, they become friends. Because we have a six-hour ride up to Santa Cruz from LA. There's a San Diego stop; there's an L.A. stop; there's a Riverside stop, which is the point where I normally go. And there's a Bakersfield stop. So, we do those stops and then we go up to Santa Cruz.

And I like the bus chaperone position because you spend the most time with the participants. Because your kind of forced to spend a bus ride up, like six hours with them. So, you have one

of the most impacts than most people do during the weekend, because they're the first face and the last face that you see for the program.

So yeah, my sophomore year, I was a bus chaperone. And it was pretty cool. And I brought up some kids. And me and a couple of our friends did it. And it was cool. You got a free flight home for a night; then you could go up on the bus and they fly you back. So that's cool. But yeah, it's cool, because a lot of people are like, "Yeah, you're the reason why I came. The bus was a really good experience."

And the bus ride there is always awkward, because it's a bunch of kids from high school that don't know each other. We pick them up around six or seven in the morning, so they're all tired. But then after the weekend, the bus ride back is always really crazy. They just start becoming really wild and start talking about their sexual experiences in high school. That always comes up on the bus ride back. That's a DHE, or a SIO weekend thing. The bus rides back are always like super crazy, and the conversations are always super crazy. But it's cool to have a bunch of DHE kids here. I was one myself. I am really, really good friends with my bus chaperone. One of the RAs that worked at College Nine, which is one of the reasons why I came to College Nine. She's graduated, but she's one of my best friends to this day. Which is cool.

And I've had that same relationship with a couple of people on the program. I brought some people up and I'm still really, really good friends. The whole thing of DHE is to bring them up here, to take the school bus, also to retain them here. So, we want them to graduate. So, I like to think that I've been a big part of the retention of several of the black students.

My involvement in ABSA, the black club on campus, has dwindled down through the years. Because the black community just was not the same as it was my freshman year. But I just kept my involvement in DHE because at least I'm getting people to the school. While I'm here, they're doing stuff and that's cool. But getting people here is one of the most important things. So as long as I was still involved in that, I felt like I was involved. And it's actually this

weekend, but I'm going to Coachella, so I won't be able to volunteer. That also was the reason why I didn't volunteer two years ago, because I also went to Coachella. So, I volunteered my sophomore and senior year. And I was a bus chaperone both times.

Vanderscoff: Huh, Coachella's this weekend.

Hudson: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: So, when you went on that bus with people, on the way up, what is it you're communicating? What do you think are the essential things you're communicating about social life, about education? What are the core things that you're telling people about why they should, or should not go to this place? What should they be taking in?

Hudson: Well, on the bus ride up, it's kind of just like, "Hey, I know we're all tired. Let's just all go to sleep." Because I'm tired, I'm up at five in the morning. They're like up, depending on which stop they're coming from. If it's San Diego, they're the first stop, around five. Riverside, they're around six o'clock. So, by the time we get to L.A. and Bakersfield, everyone's just like, it's hella early. Everyone just wants to go to sleep. So, we normally just put a movie on the bus. And normally we just go to sleep. And we stop, and we'll get some food. And we'll do a little, once we get everyone on the bus, we'll do a whole little introduction thing, a spiel, just say who we are. But the bus ride there is not really anything. It's kind of awkward, because people don't really want to talk to each other and we're not going to force them to. So, the bus ride there is just like, if you have any questions, and of course we'll come and sit next to you and stuff like that. But nothing, really. They have more questions after because they get a feel of the school. And the program itself does a pretty good job of trying to paint expectations of how will it be like when they get here, and stuff like that. So, I would say the bus ride back is normally where it gets to more of just how do you like it here, or normally they ask me that in the beginning, too. How do you like it; what's your major? And if you're a science major, they'll want to ask you about the classes on the bus ride. It's normally very logistical facts, the cut and dry. On the

bus ride up it's like, "So I'm a chem major." And they'll be like, "Oh, so how's the bio program? Or, "How's the math?" Or, "Are the classes that hard?" Or stuff like that. "How's financial aid?" Stuff like that. Nothing like crazy crazy.

But then on the way back, it's always just like, "How's 420?" Or how is other stuff?

Vanderscoff: So, what are the core things that you tell them in response to whatever sort of questions they're asking there?

Hudson: We have a trainer orientation that we go to. And they just tell us to keep it real, but also keep it censored, not be like, "420's the best thing in the world," and stuff like that. But I'm a pretty honest person and I don't really care. I tell them really how it is. And they'll ask about the black community. And like how I told you I was kind of getting out of it. My first year was great. My second year was the last year I was actually involved. And then we got a new co-chair and I didn't really like him. So, I wouldn't go. It's in the black community, so the people that knew me, knew me. So, a lot of the incoming people, that's why I did DHE, too, because it kept me relevant in the community. So, they would see me at DHE, but they would never see me at any meetings unless they ran into me during school. It just became a waste of my time to be involved. I had a lot of friends, I was still involved but then leadership and stuff happened, and they ended up not getting involved, either. So that was a whole thing.

Vanderscoff: That was leadership?

Hudson: It was just, so ABSA has co-chairs. My freshman year, the co-chairs were really great. My sophomore year, the co-chairs were pretty cool. But then by junior year, it just was falling off. I just didn't feel like this is the community anymore. I got out of it everything that I needed to, in terms of people to meet, stuff like that. The meetings were not really giving me anything that I needed. And I'm a pretty independent person anyway. And they were pretty late at night. And then my school started getting more rigorous. And I was like, I don't really have an hour

and a half to commit to you on this Thursday night when I have midterms every day. So, stuff like that. So, then I just kind of fell off. But I kept in contact with the people that I needed to keep in contact with. And that was just a thing that I would tell them. Because on the weekend, we're all volunteering together and we're all really there for them. So, we look like we're this one big, happy family.

So, on the bus ride back, I'm always just like, "Hey, don't let this be the only reason you come here because when you come here, you might be surprised that it's not like this. So, I don't want you to come here with false hopes of the black community's great, and we're going to be together all the time, and stuff like that. I'm like, "This is really only for this weekend. Because after we all go to our own separate lives, we might meet once a week. And we're not all friends in the community. But we all come together for you guys, which is cool that we can. But it's not always like this when you guys come to campus."

So that was something that I like to preach. Because a lot of times you would come and people would be like, "I didn't know it was going to be like this when I got here." And that's the biggest thing that I didn't want. Because you're committing four years of your life. You have to go to somewhere where you want to go. I don't want you coming up here on false pretenses and it's not the way it's going to be when you get here. So that was one of the biggest things on the bus ride back that I was trying to harp on. And it was like, yes, it's great, you can make your friends and stuff and come up here and get involved. 'But I'm not going to say it's going to be all lovey dovey like this all the time.

Vanderscoff: Yeah. So that's great. I mean, unless there's—is there anything further about events or initiatives that you're particularly proud to have been involved with? That could be the Students of Color Conference, which I know you were a part of doing. If there's anything there, great.

Hudson: Conferences have been cool. SOC was cool. I went my freshman year; I don't know if I went my sophomore year. But after that, I realized there was ABC, which was the Afrikan Black Coalition, which was kind of like SOC. But instead of all of the students of color from the UCs meeting, it was only the black orgs from each UC meeting. And those conferences were really, really, really fun. So, I started going to those more, and being more involved with them. Once I was more, am I in the black community? I didn't really go, because I didn't know my delegation. I went last year and it was at UC Santa Barbara. And it was fun, but it was just different. And I was just like, I'm not really in it anymore. It was not a bad thing. It was just like, I'm too old for this. And I'm just trying to graduate and I don't really need these people in my life. The conference was good. The conference is always really fun because it's always fun to be around a bunch of other black people from other UCs, that go through struggles like you. But the conference as a whole was okay. But it was a fun weekend.

But besides that, I would say I'm most proud of DHE. Because also some people that I've been chaperone for would come up and also be RAs in College Nine and stuff. So, I feel like I have an impact at least on a couple of people's lives. So, it's cool because I met a friend. She was an RA on DHE. And I came up and I became an RA. And then I was able to do the same for a couple other people that are now RAs with me right now. And it's cool, because it's like I brought you guys up. I was your bus chaperone and now we're all friends and stuff. So yeah, that's cool. And I have people that I brought up last year that I see now still. And they're like, "You're graduating?" And I'm like, "Yeah, I'm sorry." And it's cool. It's cool to know that you are the reason why someone is here, but more like a reason why someone stayed and got involved and stuff.

The Town of Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: No, that's great. So, a few topics sort of still sitting here. One thing is so in this project we've been asking, because a lot of your life, of course, is on campus. Particularly for

you, having been an RA for as many years as you have. The majority of your time has been on campus. I'm curious, then, about your dynamic with the context of this university. That could be Santa Cruz, that could be Santa Cruz County, this general area, and that could be anything from community spaces, to friends' places, to downtown, to the beach, or volunteering, however that manifests itself. I'm curious about your relationship with Santa Cruz and then the area.

Hudson: Yeah, that's pretty cool. So being an RA for so long, you need your outlets, obviously. (laughs) So being on campus for so long, I always make sure that I have a few safe spaces off campus each year to go to. There's always friends' houses, most of the time. So, I always make sure that there's a couple of friends' houses off campus that I can go to. I have a car and it's really nice. So, I would normally reach out to those friends quite a bit. Quite a bit. So just break up the monotony of being on campus. When you're on campus, you're always an RA. Especially when you're in College Nine. People always see you for your job. And it's just like, you can't do anything. Because I have a role to uphold, kind of. That has been probably one of the best things, just having a place to go off and unwind and be with your friends. Because also when you're an RA, you live in a single and it's on a floor with all the freshmen. And it's cool, because they become your friends, too. But it's better when you can go to other people's houses and just get out and stuff.

I really like the campus. I'm a loner, but a proud loner. I'm pretty introverted and like being around my floor a lot. I crave a lot of alone time. So, I go on hikes a lot, in the forest, by myself for a couple of hours and just disappear. Or I'll just drive to the beach, go to the beach. This year, my friends have a house on West Cliff, which is really, really, really nice. I was actually there on Saturday, or on Sunday, one of those days. And it's just right there. So, it's really, really nice. So, it's kind of like, two in one. I get to go to my friend's house, and I get to go to the beach. So, it's cool.

But yeah, I just do a lot of stuff by myself in the city. I like the city a lot. It's a cute little town. It's not too much, not too little. I don't really like cities. I don't like a lot of people. So, it's pretty nice for me. It's a pretty mellow beach town. I don't know really what more I could ask for.

The Social Scene at UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: And we'll get to the campus and the natural aspect in a second. But first, so you mentioned that the conference was at UCSB. How would you characterize the social scene, the social side of things here at Santa Cruz, relative to other universities that you may have been to or heard about through your friends? What distinguishes it here?

Hudson: It's very easy to be alone in Santa Cruz, just because, especially with our frat culture here, that has a lot to do with it. Because a lot of the times, the frat people are the party culture at other universities and stuff. And since ours is so under the radar and frowned upon, it's not as widely advertised and such as at many other colleges. The frat parties aren't that big. We don't have to go to frat parties and stuff like that. It's very easy to fly under the radar. So, a lot of times people ask me like, "What do you do here? What do you guys do for fun?" That's a question on DHE a lot, "What do you guys do for fun? Where do you guys have parties and stuff?" And a lot of it is who you know, and the friends you make, and also what you like to do. There's someone for everyone here but you have to actually go out and find it, because it's not as in your face as it might be in other universities.

Vanderscoff: And then what has that been for you in particular?

Hudson: It's been pretty good for me. My freshman year, I made a lot of friends on my floor. And then that's carried on throughout college. I made a lot of good friends I'm friends with today. And through my RA job, I've made a couple close friends through that. And then being in the black community, I've made friends through that. So, I have a lot of different sets of friends, which is cool because I get bored easily, which is why I like to move around and stuff a

lot. So, it's cool, because it keeps me well-rounded and it keeps me not bored with one group of people in particular. Also, it's who you know, and I'm pretty fortunate to know a lot of cool people. So, if I'm feeling bored, there's probably someone I can hit up and be like, "Hey, what are you doing?" But a lot of times, I like my alone times, so a lot of times I'm not with anyone.

Vanderscoff: So, speaking of that alone time, you mentioned that the campus was one of the places that struck you initially, the physical campus itself, the landscape, and that you hike a lot. So, could you say a little bit more about this particular campus as a place to think in and walk around in and be alone in and learn in.

Hudson: It's one of its kind, especially in the UC system. I don't feel there's anywhere else where there's so much accessibility to so many quiet places in nature. Especially in College Nine, we are literally the top of campus. And there's literally nothing beyond our colleges but forest and trails and stuff like that. So, I don't know if it would be different if I lived in College Eight, or Oakes, where it was not as much free forest to go around into. But when you're in College Nine and Ten, even Merrill and Crown and stuff, up there, we're at the top. So, there's just really nothing but forest behind us. And it's pretty cool. And I just walk out of my room and just go up the hill and I'm in the forest. And it's like hey, that's pretty nice when you just want to walk and go enjoy the day.

Vanderscoff: And you all have that meadow just north of Nine and Ten. (laughs)

Hudson: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: Is that a thing [for socializing], the meadow? I mean, when I, yeah—

Hudson: Yeah, the meadow is still, it's not as much of a thing, there's now circles behind College Nine and people go in there and smoke and stuff. But the meadow will probably still be crazy on 420. Porter meadow is on the top.

Financial Struggles

Vanderscoff: So, one question I skipped over in a previous section—and you alluded to this prior—I think a big part of being a student in a public university now is dealing with the financial aspect of things. I know we're taking a right turn here away from the campus, but I missed this and wanted to get back to it. So, I'm wondering what your comment is—you mentioned the RA job—just in terms of managing the financial aspect of attending in an era when there's tuition hikes, when it's become increasingly normalized for students at public universities to emerge with really substantial debt burdens.

Hudson: Yeah, well, everyone hates financial aid. (laughs) Everyone hates the financial aid office. And my freshman year, taking out loans was just something that I knew that I was going to have to do, just because like you said, it has become very normalized. But with this job, it's been nice. But I still have friends that struggle with financial aid on the daily. Managing your money is really crazy in college, because you do learn and especially because a lot of my friends come from lower income places, so they do take out more loans.

And it's hard, though, because you get a big lump sum at the beginning of the quarter. And then you have three months to just keep it. It's really hard not to just spend it all in the beginning. So, you learn a lot about money management and priorities and what you really do need to spend your money on and stuff.

And when I lived off campus, that was also crazy, because rent and stuff like that, which is also another reason why I became an RA, because paying for bills was a lot. And I wasn't really an adult that much yet. So, I was just like yeah, no. I applied to be an RA.

But that's also a really big challenge with a lot of my friends. But there's resources on campus that I just figured out. If financial aid is messing with you, or if you've exhausted all your financial aid and still need stuff, then people are there for you on campus. Like the dean's office,

they loan out computers for free. [If students have] exhausted all their financial aid and they still can't afford to pay, they can apply [for funds] to buy their school supplies, or have their books paid for the quarter. Or just help with food for the quarter. I also know a lot of people that are on food stamps and stuff in college right now, which is totally fine with me. So, yeah. There are ways of people making it work, but it's definitely a struggle for a lot of people. But then some people, it's not a struggle at all. And it's also crazy to see how they navigate through school. It's like wow, you really have no cares in the world and that must be great. But we can't always just be going out every weekend, because I'm poor.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, tell me more about that dynamic. There's this whole process for getting money for folks who are then taking out loans who are doing things like RAing, and then there's other people with a different student experience, right?

Hudson: Yeah, exactly, exactly. Especially being an RA, with the residents, it comes up across a lot. Things that they will say, like, "Oh, yeah, this weekend I did this, this, and this." Or, I don't know, "We should go out to eat here." Their view on life is not really in terms of money. Even a lot of people I know that are wealthy, they do have way more strict parent involvement in their money. But it's still not super crazy where they can't do a lot of things. So, a lot of them will be like, "I'm going to go do this this weekend. I'm going to eat here." They'll be buying shoes every weekend. And I'm just like how? How? Please, tell me how. So, stuff like that. So, it's just weird. But it shows up mostly in, I would say, clothes. And this is the era of online shopping. So, when people are getting packages all the time, it's just like, how are you affording to get these packages all the time? That's really crazy. So, it's just stuff like that. I haven't really encountered people that rub it in their face. They just live life differently, and they're just ignorant to it. I'm not mad at you; it's just a different reality than mine.

Vanderscoff: Right. Because here, of course, we're getting into another conversation. We've had a conversation about race at UCSC, right, and what we're getting into here is a conversation about class, functionally.

Hudson: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: And is that something that in terms of your own educational experience in terms of teaching this particular class—did that intersectionality of issues emerge in that course?

Hudson: I would say yeah, one of the biggest concepts that kept on coming up in the class was the concept of privilege and what all of that holds and entails. So, for instance, we would talk about people that have a lot of privilege, and how they live their life very ignorant. And it's just not really that bad. We talked about privilege and it's just very, very weird. Because people that are privileged don't really know it a lot of the times and we get mad at them for living their lives the only way they know how to live it. We gave this example, me and my teacher, we were like okay, so we all walk to class every day. But think about the people that have to use the DRC vans every day. And just think about how non-accessible this campus is for people that have crazy accessibilities. I've had friends with broken ankles and stuff, they're like, "Yeah, I'm late to class because the van was late," or something like that. They have a whole other life that we don't have to live and we would never know because it's not our lives. So, it's kind of the same. We can't really get too, too mad at people that seem more privileged because a lot of the time, the thing about privilege is you don't know unless it's pointed out. But that's also the thing, when people point it out, you have to be able to be receptive to that, which comes out down to listening to people. So, it's a weird dynamic. It's something that's really easily breaking down but it's not, because people are very stubborn. And privilege can build a complex and it builds stubbornness, which is really hard to break down. Almost all our problems that we were talking about in the class all came back to ignorance and people holding more privilege than other people.

Vanderscoff: You mentioned something earlier about there maybe being a problem with people telling stories and not listening. Is this what you meant by that?

Hudson: Yeah, yeah.

Vanderscoff: Say a little more about that, maybe.

Hudson: Because in our class, [we talked about] how do we change the world because all this shit's happening. It ends up being a depressing class. We're just like: this is happening, this is happening, this is happening. And like, we just all were talking [about how] one reason why things don't happen is because the world lacks a lot of empathy. If privileged people had the empathy, that means that they would hear people's stories and listen to them and want to help them and change stuff out. Because honestly, when people want to do stuff, you need people in charge to actually help you carry stuff out, or else we're just talking. But the people that are on the top don't want to listen. I don't know why, because their own privilege gets in the way, or they actually think that what you're doing is wrong, or they don't think that you're valid in what you're saying; you're just complaining. Which is the whole thing about listening to people. If you actually listen to people and are able to empathize with them—empathy only comes with really listening to a person—then we won't get nowhere. Because if a group of people are saying, "We're marginalized or we're harmed," and someone at the top is just like, "No, you're not." And it's just like, "We're all not talking for no reason, you know. There's actually something wrong." But then it takes someone of privilege to actually be like, "No, actually something is wrong." And then they're like, oh, okay. Which is weird. Because they just have empathy for the wrong type of people. They need someone that's on their status to tell them. It's like if we go to the doctor and I'm like, "Oh, my arm is broken." And the doctor doesn't believe me until you tell them that my arm is broken. And then he's like, "Okay, let's actually try to fix it." Something like that.

So actually, listening is cool, because then it actually allows you to put into a place. Because obviously people aren't listening. Because if not, then people wouldn't be still protesting about all this stuff, and all this stuff wouldn't be going on right now.

Vanderscoff: And I think in a modest way, that's one of our goals, my goals, I mean, for this particular student interview project, is that we're getting a spread of experiences out there, which people can then kind of check out and hear.

Hudson: Yeah, exactly.

Vanderscoff: So how are you doing on time, by the way? We're an hour and a half in.

Hudson: Cool, cool.

National Politics

Vanderscoff: There's not much left. But one question is just that, and this actually is a good segue from that, which is what have been the national events that have kind of seeped into UCSC? I mean, if you think about your time here, what have been the undeniable larger events that concretely impacted life here? And then if you could speak about that in terms of you personally.

Hudson: Okay. I'll try to start freshman year, if I remember. Well, 2012 was Obama's second term. And that was cool. It happened. I couldn't vote because I wasn't eighteen, so I kind of felt out of the loop. But it was nothing crazy. We kind of all knew he was going to win again, especially at this school. No one was really trying to like—it was whatever. It was an election. It was a regular election. You know, someone was going win; someone was going to lose. We all, especially in Santa Cruz, were just like yay, Obama, it's going to be Obama. If it's not him, then it's going to be crazy. And that happened, and it was cool. We were like, yay, second term.

My sophomore year, I don't really remember much happening. My junior year, I remember one of the big things was the Trayvon Martin shooting. That shaped the black community in a big way—I don't know I would say as much the university—but it did shape the black community in a really big way. Because after that, then the trend of unarmed shootings kind of spiked, and that was a whole thing that has still carried on till this day. It was very, very prevalent in my junior and my senior year. Every time we'd go to our friends' house, it would just always just be talking about the shootings, or America, or social justice. I have a lot of social justicey friends, especially like a lot of my black friends are really involved in their communities, and just organizing, and trying to do well for the community. So, there's not one time we go over to their house and social justice stuff doesn't come up. 'But that was a really particularly hard time. I remember we had an RA meeting right after the verdict came out. And that was just pretty, pretty crazy. So yeah, that was my junior year.

Vanderscoff: What happened at the meeting, when the Zimmerman acquittal [happened]?

Hudson: So my boss was like, "Hey, where are you guys on a scale of one to ten?" And that year I think there was me and two other black people on staff. It was me and this guy and then I think this girl. She gets around and some people were like, seven; some people don't even know what's going on; some people are like one. She gets to me and I'm like zero. Some people are just like yeah, two, three, whatever. And she was just like, "If you guys need to leave, then I totally understand." But I was like, there's really nothing I'm going to do if I leave. And this is my job, so I have to be here for this meeting. So, I just went ahead and just did the meeting, because what am I going to do, just go outside and be mad? At least this took my mind off of it for a little bit. So that was that meeting.

It was just weird because then College Nine tried to do some programs and stuff around it. But I don't know, it was a big issue to tackle. There's really no right or wrong way to do it. But there was just nothing—I don't know, I don't know; it was just weird. It was just weird. They had a

little vigil in the quarry, I think, for him, and I went to that. And people were just talking and stuff.

But then when it happens over and over and over and over, you kind of get desensitized. I care, but I can't have the emotions that I had every time, because I'm a very logical person. And to me, it's just very illogical and emotionally unhealthy to always keep putting myself in those emotions, in those emotions. If I'm not really trying to do anything to change it, I'm like, what am I? I'm not really emotionally involved. I am, and of course it hurts every time. But I'm not going to be crying, or getting really, really angry. Because I'm trying to be a student and that's intersectionality: a lot happens. You're trying to be a student and you have so much other shit to worry about, but then you have all this shit to worry about, too. That's when, becoming a black student on campus, it's particularly hard when stuff your social life interacts with your academics, if it already doesn't, on a day-to-day basis. But you have to worry about that, and you worry about people at home. You're afraid for your families to go out in public, and just stuff like that. That's when it's very hard to be a student. You have to block it out because have to be a student; you have to graduate. Because, at the end of the day, you are trying to graduate and do something better for your community. So, you've got to kind of prioritize and push through.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, so could you say a little more about how you practice self-care in a situation like that, where you're balancing these intersectional things.

Hudson: Um, ice cream. No, (laughs) I don't know. I surround myself with people where it's an outlet and a lot of my friends, we're able to just talk. And that does a lot. You just talk and talk, and you just talk because you know you're not going to be able to solve the problem overnight. So, it's just talking and talking. And like I said, I spend a lot of alone time. So, I go hike. I go to the beach. Or I go out with friends. It's just like little stuff like that. Nothing crazy. I'll talk to my family. That's what I do a lot. Just talking to my family. If shit gets really, really

intense, I'll journal. I'll write notes in my phone. But that rarely, rarely happens. Most of the time it's just hanging out with like-minded people so you can kind of just be in misery together. Just talking about the issues and just talking, like why—just trying to understand why is a big part. Why things are in the world. Because once we find out why, we're better equipped to solve them, and just see what little things we do to prevent the why in our communities. Like back at home and stuff. Because you can't change the world, but it's just nice to talk about it with your friends.

Vanderscoff: And then, of course, one huge event that's happened recently, like the opposite of, some people might say, some commentators might argue (laughter) from Obama's reelection, of course, is this recent election. So, I'm curious then about, keeping in mind the continuity of events that we've already been discussing, what the election does? And that brings us up to the present moment nicely.

Hudson: So this election was weird for many reasons. It was particularly weird because I had a Trump supporter on my floor. That was interesting, to say the least. He was just like, "Yeah, I'm a Trump supporter." And I was just like, "Why?" And he was just, "Because my grandpa worked for him," or something. His grandpa was involved with him somehow business-wise and he really respected the fact that he was such a good businessman, stuff like that. And I was just like, "How can you overlook all the other stuff?" And basically, he didn't understand; he was this white kid from Boston, so he was raised pretty conservatively. So, he just didn't understand. He just didn't understand. And I just kind of left it at that, because I wasn't trying to get into that whole thing in that moment. [I think I had] something to do.

So, then we all watched the election in my room. A lot of my floor watched the election in my room. Twenty of us in my room and the room next door. And this shit was going down and we were like wow, this is crazy. It's not going to happen, though. But then it happened. And everyone was just like, whoa—like whoa. And the Trump supporter was also in my room at

this time. But he didn't say anything. But I knew that he was silently really happy. And it was like hey, your guy won. Cool.

But then, from what I believe, the big protests started in College Nine. A lot of people, a lot of students, started to go through the buildings and they were screaming, "Fuck Donald Trump." And then, from what I heard, that group went throughout campus, the naked run style, but the fuck Donald Trump style. Yeah, and they came back through College Nine again. And a lot of my residents went and partook. I was just there seeing what happened.

And the next day, it was like crazy, crazy morning. People were crying. People were just, especially in College Nine and College Ten, social injustice—our themes are really closely connected.

So, the next day, as an RA, I went and checked on all my residents. I was like, "How "Are you doing? Are you okay? What's going on?" I was mad, but then I talked to my dad on the phone. And he was just like, "Hey, it is what it is. As black people, there's really nothing different. Another racist white guy's in the office. Like, hurray." And I was like, "You know? You're kind of right." People were out there really protesting Donald Trump. And we were just like, "He's president. This is not going to get him impeached." I'm really logical, so it takes away a lot of my emotions. But I was just like, "We should be protesting about the electoral college and not Donald Trump. Because it is what it is." When he got elected, I was like, yes, he's probably going to do some horrible things, but we don't really, really know that yet. So, we can only react when shit starts happening. Shit is happening, and we are reacting. But we didn't know. I'm really a big proponent of don't worry until you really have to because that's bad for health and stuff. So, I was pretty calm through that whole process. I was looking out for other people and just telling them he's not president yet; we still have all these days left with Obama. And just reassuring them.

I ran into one of my bosses in the dining hall. She comes up to me and she's crying. And I was just, "Yeah, it's a tough day, huh?" And she's like, "Yeah, it is." And I had a meeting with my real supervisor that day, too. And she was also crying. She was really sad. I was just telling her where I was coming from: "We don't know until we know. And when we know, we will do." And I was telling her, "Being in the black community, our people have not stopped dying. Our people have not got out of poverty. And we've always been getting the shit-end of the stick." And I was just like, "What's unique about this election is now everyone is experiencing what we have been for this whole time. We've been out here protesting, but our voices have never been heard. But now that everyone's rights are getting attacked, now everyone all of a sudden is just on this train, like oh my gosh, what's going to happen to us?" And I'm like, welcome to our world. So, I was kind of jaded by it all because this is really not that much different. We're still going to be continuing the fight that we've been having to do forever.

He's here and he's doing stuff and it's crazy. But people are reacting. I don't know. I don't say I like it, but it puts America in perspective for a lot of people that thought we lived in this utopia of a country. They're like, "Oh, racism is dead." And I'm like, "Oh, that's crazy, because now look at proof; someone that ran his campaign on very racist ideals is now the president. So even though he lost the popular vote, he didn't lose it by that much. So, you know that many people in America do think the way he does." A lot of the arguments they would use against the black community all got put out. And it's just like, this is not as good of a place as you thought it might have been.

And it was really eye-opening for a lot of people. And now that no one is safe, I'm hoping that it brings a lot more empathy for each other. Because everyone's issues are being attacked, so should fight for everyone's issues equally instead of trying to pick and choose. Everyone is now valid in what they're doing. So hopefully, if and when it all blows over, when people have other issues we will all remember this and just be like, "Hey, remember we were all attacked.

Remember how silenced we felt by his administration? Maybe we don't want people to feel like that again." So hopefully we can act and be more inclusive and stuff like that.

Vanderscoff: And have you seen any of that happen here? Have there been any signs of that? And if so, what in terms of your experience here, and then relating to the student body here?

Hudson: I don't know. It's just definitely made the conversations more normalized. A lot of people are just more open to learn about differences. Because a lot of stuff, especially transgender rights and stuff like that, is coming up. And a lot of people don't know the difference between sex and gender, or the difference between all the different types of sexualities and stuff like that. So, a lot of education is happening for a lot of people and I think it's pretty good. Because all you can do is just educate and just hope that it resonates with them.

But yeah, there's a lot more protests and stuff going on here. There's always a protest going on for something in Santa Cruz, period. But now there's, I would say, more stuff happening. Yeah, I don't know. Everyone just feels more on high alert. A little after this interview is when the students of ABSA occupied Kerr Hall to get their demands met by the chancellor, and while I wasn't a part of it because I'm not really a part of ABSA due to other reasons, it was nice to see their demands get met and I was proud. Despite how much criticism they received for their tactics from the many non-students of color, it was nice and surprising to see how many allies did show up too. I feel after this whole Trump people really feel like not one group can do it alone and that was very evident those three days of sitting in. '

Vanderscoff: Here in the campus culture.

Hudson: Yeah. Just a little bit. You know, he's president, so that not our day-to-day concern, because we can't live our lives in fear. Everyone has carried on their lives, but everyone's more aware of current events and him bombing Syria and stuff like that. And everyone's more opinionated on the Pepsi ad that just came out with Kendall Jenner. And people just seem to

realize shitty stuff is going on in America and America's not the greatest place everyone thought that it was.

Teaching this class and seeing these presenters teach on Wednesday nights, I've also learned a lot—how we're just basically big hypocrites in America. Like a lot of places, we don't want immigrants. But a lot of the reasons why people are trying to come here is because we're in their shit, in their countries, messing shit up for them. Stuff like that. So, more knowledge is coming out of the stuff that's happening now. Which is, I guess, all we can hope for. And then hopefully we can look back and be like, let's never do that again.

So, the president is the president. But hopefully it has a lasting impact on the future, so we can actually look back and be like, hey, look, shit's going on. Because at first when we did that, we were looking back, but there was really not a lot of unrest. Because like slaves and stuff—the power was pretty one-dimensional. But now everyone is finding their voice.

We're not that far from a post-racial society. Civil rights was in the '60s; interracial marriage wasn't allowed till the early '70s. And stuff like that—it took hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years for us to build these establishments up. And all of our constitution and stuff is based off of shit that's so old. So, of course, it's not going to turn over overnight. Rome wasn't built in a day. So, we have a lot of time. I just feel like it happens in waves. A lot of people in the black community are calling this the second civil rights era and stuff like that. So, waves are happening. And hopefully now that we're all being attacked, we'll all unify together and be there for one another.

But obviously people have—their more pressing identities are going to come forward first. But then hopefully they don't put everyone else on the back burner. One can only hope. Like in the black community, I see a lot of Black Lives Matter. But now I'm seeing a lot of Queer Black Lives Matter, and Black Women's Lives Matter, and stuff like that. So, taking into account, if you're going to be for something, be for all of it. If you're going to be pro-life, say, be for pro-

every life. When it comes to abortion, like pro-life, anti-police brutality and stuff like that. Pro-life, anti-war, and stuff like that. Don't just pick and choose. Advocate what it stands for.

Final Reflections

Vanderscoff: And so, we come to the final two questions I have here. So, one of them is just, so you're commencing soon, you're graduating soon.

Hudson: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: And so, this might be building on what you were just talking about, but when you reflect on personal growth and change, what distinctly, do you think, UCSC as such, as opposed to UC whatever else, or CSU or whatever, has done for you as a place to be and to think from?

Hudson: Well I came into college a little bit more hardheaded. It's made me more understanding, and I would say, more compassionate and more empathetic.

Vanderscoff: And if you connect this to any of the examples we've talked about as we go through, that would be great, too.

Hudson: I don't know. My freshman year, I was just more hardheaded when it came to dealing with other people. So, there's a lot of sensitive guys on my floor, and I didn't come from a place where guys were super sensitive. So that was a really big roadblock for me. Very early on in my college career, I was learning how to deal with different people. And the College Nine theme, global international perspectives, it resonated with me because you just realize that people all come from different places. I learned a lot about my biases and not to judge a lot of people. I learned to give people more second chances. You might have a first impression, but there's always willing for another impression. If I don't like you right off the bat, I'll give another chance. Maybe you're cool. I've become more of an understanding, and more of an open-minded person, open to learning more about different subjects. Like, I took an acting class last

quarter. I had a lot of friends in the theater department because through RAs I've met friends in the theater department and I have delved into their world and how different it is from mine, and just accepting that. I've been really open to accepting people's differences and realizing that makes them what they are.

Of course, the racism stuff you can't look past. But there's stuff you're just like, "Oh, you're a person. And you come with as many things as I do and I can't just put you off based on what I've heard in the past." And I'm really big on not being hypocritical. As a black person, you have a lot of stereotypes and a lot of biases against you already. So, I just try to live life not that way, not like how you've seen people like that been treated. Just more understanding and more open and more willing to educate and more willing to learn.

Vanderscoff: And if there's something particular about UCSC as a place that's enabled that for you? Like what do you attribute that to?

Hudson: Um, I don't know. Maybe the chill, laid back environment. It's just like, I don't know, people are pretty approachable, I would say, for the most part. But I always tell people that in College Nine we live in a bubble. I feel like College Nine and College Ten are different than the other colleges, in that the people there are just people. I don't know. They're not crazy anything. They don't believe in crazy, I don't know, there's not that many hate crimes and stuff that happen up there. When we do DHE and stuff, for instance, we choose College Nine to stay at overnight because that's one of the only places where a hate bias incident hasn't occurred, ever, through the history of the program. And, for instance, at Cowell and Stevenson—I know my friends that live in the African American house in Cowell and Stevenson have a way different college experience than I do, especially as of lately, because they've been a part of some hate crimes in their dorm. People go in there and tear down posters and stuff like that. So, I just got really lucky that I chose College Nine and Ten. I've just been lucky with the people that I interact with. And no one's been super fucked up in college. And it's just been pretty nice.

Overall, it's been a nice growing experience. I haven't really had to combat my beliefs, and I've been able to grow without having to always fight someone. You know, and actually say what I believe instead of always having to defend what I do and questioning do I actually believe in this. So, it's been pretty cool.

Also, the campus is—it's just a pretty chill campus overall, though. And the whole model, the authority of questioning authority. That's like, whatever. It does resonate with me just a little bit, though—the way I've seen my bosses and my teachers and stuff approach their work. Especially my bosses, they're really cool people, and they're always willing to grow and they're always willing to learn. That's just the mindset that I've really adopted. And it's not necessarily Santa Cruz, but I guess the experiences that I've experienced. The whole changing my major so late was a big decision. Because I was just like, I don't know. After that, I've just adopted the motto of nothing is set in stone. There's always room for growth, or there's always room for you to change your mind.

Like I said, I like change a lot, so I'm always willing for something to change. To the point where my mom was like, "You have to at least pick a job when you graduate." And I'm like, "Yeah, okay, I'll do that." But I'm just always open and willing for things to change. I'm willing to accept it and just roll with the punches more. And that's something that I've learned here, just through the whole major change, and just seeing how people live their lives. A lot of people don't do what makes them happy. And I'm just like, "Do what makes you happy and then it should be fine."

Vanderscoff: So, a final question, then. You're graduating, what's next?

Hudson: Pharmacy school. Yeah, I want to be pharmacist. But not a CVS pharmacist. And not in big pharma, because it's super unethical and I hate those people. (laughs) So, I'm going to study for the PCAT and hopefully get into a pharmacy school. I would to do a hospital pharmacy type of thing that interacts with people. Because I would still want to keep the people

interaction part of my day-to-day life. Just because if I have a good impact on someone I'm like, why not? You know, and there are these people that are dying. I wanted to be a doctor once but then I realized that I hated doctors, because a lot of them are super assholes and they don't really care for the patients. The nurses are really what keeps the hospitals going, and the nurses are some of the nicest people. But I wouldn't want to be a nurse, because I can't change a bedpan. Stuff like that, I just couldn't do. So, I would want to stay in the hospital, but in a way, I can still have an impact, but also not be a doctor. Because the biology just wasn't for me. So yeah, as a pharmacist talk to people and help them out in their lives and see things in a different light.

It's also cool that I'm a black scientist. I would like to, when I leave, like later on in life do something for black people in the STEM field, just so they have resources and stuff. Because it's hard when you're at this school and you see no one. That's why you only have your friends in the STEM field, which is really cool, because we're such a close little community. It's just like, "Oh, you're really doing neuroscience." And then like, "You're really doing chemistry. And it's good shit, man. Good shit." So, it's really nice and affirming to know the people here. But it's hard because if people didn't do it before you, it's kind of hard to pioneer your own path. You're just figuring everything out by yourself, basically. It would be nice to talk to black faculty or something like that. But we have no black faculty in the sciences at this school. It was pretty hard. So, it would be nice to give back to my community that way. I don't know what shape or form that would take, but it's something I'm looking forward to later on in life.

Vanderscoff: Perfect. Unless there's anything else you'd like to say in closing about something that we've said?

Hudson: No. I think it's cool. I would just to say my experience here is not everyone's black experience and I don't speak for everyone. At UC Santa Cruz, the way the college system is set up, they each do hold their own unique identity. Where you live, does have a big impact. That's

probably one of the biggest things. I'm just really happy and fortunate and blessed that I chose College Nine. But if I were anywhere else, it probably would have been totally different.

Vanderscoff: That's great. So, on my end and on behalf of this endeavor, I'd like to thank you so much for your time and for the work you've been doing here at UCSC.

Hudson: Cool.

Vanderscoff: Thank you so much.

Sofia Johnston

At the time of this interview, Sofia Johnston was a senior at Oakes College. She was a peer advisor at Oakes, a residential assistant, and a facilitator for EQUAL (a queer + support group at Oakes). She also was a co-leader of the Practical Activism conference at UCSC. Johnston graduated from UCSC with a degree in sociology in 2017 and is now working on her MA in Counseling at St. Mary's College.

Vanderscoff: Today is Monday, April 17, 2017, and this is Cameron Vanderscoff here for the UCSC Student Interviews project. The way we've been starting these interviews is by asking folks if they could introduce themselves, identify themselves in whatever words they choose, and then start us off by saying a little bit about their background.

Early Life

Johnston: Okay. My name is Sofia Johnston. I am a fourth-year student majoring in sociology. I will have also a minor in literature. I'm an Oakes affiliate. And I identify as a queer person of color. That has affected and influenced now I navigate this university a little bit and in other ways inspired me and helped me find very specific communities of people.

Vanderscoff: That's great and I look forward to exploring a lot of that in the interview itself. And so, the primary focus of this project, of course, is your time here at UCSC. But we're curious about what it is that you're bringing with you here. So maybe, if you wouldn't mind just saying a little bit where you're from, a little bit about your personal background, and then we can move to talking about some of your earlier educational experiences.

Johnston: Okay. Where I'm from is like—it's kind of complicated because I was born in the Bay Area, in Berkeley, and then we lived in the Bay Area, in a few different cities, until I was about then years old. And then we moved down to Southern California in a small town called Lake Elsinore. It's near the Temecula wine country. Our closest UC is UCR. I spent from fifth grade to the end of high school in Lake Elsinore, so I do consider it the area where I grew up. But I also feel connected to the Bay Area in some way.

Lake Elsinore—it was a pretty small town. Not too small. It wasn't everyone knew everyone. But it was fairly small. It was really hot, which was one of the reasons I came up to Santa Cruz. I wanted to be back in the cooler weather. Also, the inland area of California tended to be more conservative. I wanted a space that was more liberal and Santa Cruz, in my opinion, is definitely more liberal leaning, more liberal leaning than a lot of other spaces that I've been in.

Vanderscoff: And so, then walking through your time in the Bay, and then Lake Elsinore, would you mind just saying a little bit about your family's attitude to education and then how your own education correspondingly developed.

Johnston: My parents both have more than a bachelor's. My dad has his master's in landscape architecture and my mom has her doctorate in education. And they both met at UC Berkeley. So, education was definitely important in my family just because my parents had gone through the process. They were both first generation in some regards. Even though my mom's parents attended college, they attended college and university in the Philippines. So, it did affect my mom when she was applying to university. There's just a lot that's different from universities in America and universities in the Philippines. So, she does identify a little bit with some of the struggles that first

generation students have, though she recognizes she is not a first-generation student and that her parents did get higher education. Their degrees, when they came over, were honored.

So yeah, education, just in that regard, was pretty important. My parents didn't really push it onto me. They were very much like, do what feels right for you. But to some regard, education, and higher education, was always on my radar. They always just wanted me to do my best. So, if I came home with Cs, Ds, Fs, they were always okay with that, if they knew it was my best effort. They were never too strict about grades. I did do well in school because just knowing that they wanted me to do my best, it kind of made me think about well, what is my best? So, I always tried to strive higher than just being average.

They never pressured me into going to UC Berkeley. I was interested in Berkeley for a little bit. Actually, for like most of my life, I was more interested in Berkeley. But ultimately, the grades, the SAT scores just didn't line up in the end. But they lined up for Santa Cruz. Santa Cruz was my second choice—more of a, I don't know, I wouldn't say it was a safety school—but it was in my reach area.

Applying to UC Santa Cruz

When I was choosing colleges, it was between Santa Cruz and Humboldt State. I wanted Humboldt because it had one of the best environmental science programs. However, I knew I would not be sticking with that. So, it made more sense to me to go to UC Santa Cruz, where I knew they had more departments, more access to resources. So ultimately, that's why I chose Santa Cruz.

Vanderscoff: So you come to Santa Cruz because of the depth and the breadth of its resources. And then you also mentioned its more liberal reputation, in contrast to where you were living at the time.

Johnston: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: So thinking about both of those things, then, I'm curious then if we can go into the first days, weeks, months that you actually show up in Santa Cruz, and then what the reality was that you found compared to those expectations, and compared to home.

Johnston: Hmm. So that's a really big question, questions. I guess what really stood out for me was actually a little bit before I came to Santa Cruz. I was in a triple my first year and they had alerted us: "We just posted your roommates on the portal. If they've given you access to contacting them, feel free to do so."

So, I checked online and my roommates were listed. I think they had their phone numbers, or maybe it was just emails and then I got their phone numbers. It's kind of fuzzy. In any case, we ended up texting. Not a group chat or anything, just individually were texting each other. So, all throughout high school I had not been out to anyone except for my close friends. People might have had their own suspicions. And anyone who asked in high school, I would give them a truthful answer. So, I think people knew, it just wasn't—I never considered myself comfortably out, as I kind of would put it.

In college, I didn't want to be in the closet. I didn't want to be trying to hide this big part of who I am. So, I remember texting both of my roommates, like just saying, "Hey, I'm gay, and if you have a problem with that, that sucks. You can switch rooms, I don't

care." And then I remember both of them were just like—one of them was from Fremont and the other one was from Berkeley—and both of them were just like, it's cool. It's not a big deal to us. So that was a huge relief for me. It made me feel a little bit more comfortable, at least in my immediate living space.

Before coming to Santa Cruz, I'd been going through a lot and I started seeing a therapist. I remember when this was all happening, my dad and I, we were taking a walk around our neighborhood at night because it would be way too hot to do that during the day. So, we were walking around and we sat near my old bus stop where we get picked up to get taken to school. I'd gone to that bus stop since middle school, to high school. We were just sitting down. He was just like, "What are you trying to get out of your college experience?" Because I'd kind of expressed, "Oh my gosh, I just want to get out of here, I just want to go to college." And just had these kinds of implicit notions of—it will be different in college. I just told him, "Yeah, college is going to be different. It's going to be better." And he just kind of looked at me. He nodded his head and he was just like, "Yeah, but the thing is, if you want change to happen, you also have to be willing to change." And that really struck me. It's one of those things I think about a lot because it did influence how I would interact with people when I came here. Because when I came here, I kept thinking about—like in high school, I was a very shy person. Kept to myself, was pretty cynical. I just didn't really vibe a lot with my peers. It wasn't my scene, really. I didn't really get involved.

Arriving at UC Santa Cruz

So, when I came into college, I did want that change. So, I pushed myself throughout my first year to be more vocal, and to hang out just in our common areas. We did have

lounges at the time at Oakes. So, I would try and hang out in the lounges. I still didn't do it that much but I felt I was doing better than maybe I would have without that conversation.

And then coming here—the first few days I remember I met my RA. Her name was Jessica and she was also queer. She spotted me out and made sure to talk to me and let me know that Santa Cruz was a safe space. I don't know if she was doing that because she could like—I don't want to say "gaydar" in a way, but in a way kind of like picking up on I was queer, too, and she was as well. So, I remember before we went to the Boardwalk Frolic, her and our other RA, Kayla, had taken some of the residents to the beach and just to explore downtown a little bit. And we when we were at the beach, Jessica and I were sitting on the sand and we were talking about growing up queer and growing up in more conservative areas, conservative households. That conversation really made me feel comfortable being queer. Because I knew even if everyone in Santa Cruz didn't accept who I was, at least I had a space in my residential hall where at least one person would be there for me and would definitely listen to me if I was having any issues regarding being out in college. For me, that was like a huge deal. That was one of the most vivid memories I have of my first days here at Santa Cruz, is meeting Jessica and realizing like, oh, cool, there's someone here who's like me and who's going to watch my back in some regard.

Vanderscoff: How had you wound up at Oakes in the first place?

Johnston: So that's a cool story, actually. So, when I found out I got into Santa Cruz, my dad, I think, had posted about it on Facebook. My dad used to work at Santa Cruz. He was the college programs coordinator for Kresge College from about, I don't know, it

wasn't a long time. It was mid '90s-ish, but it was only a couple of years. And during that time, one of the students he had hired to be there—I don't know what they call them over at Kresge—I know every college has its own name for a programs person. So, their student program coordinators, one of them was Homayun [Etamadi], who is currently works here at the university.

So when my dad had posted that, Homayun commented, "Oh my gosh, I work at Santa Cruz. We should meet up and I can talk to your daughter about Santa Cruz and just give them a better sense of what Santa Cruz is going to be like," or something to that effect.

So, during my spring break in high school, we drove up here, visited the campus. I'd just gotten rejected from Berkeley and I was devastated at that time. So, I was not into seeing any of the colleges. But we started off—I think we started in order. So, we saw Stevenson and Cowell. Then we went to Crown and Merrill. We drove by Nine and Ten; we didn't really look at that one. And, of course, we went to Kresge because my dad knew what Kresge was about, just having worked there. So, we saw Kresge, Porter, walked down, I think, to, it was College Eight at the time, so Rachel Carson. And then Oakes.

And throughout the day, the more colleges we saw, the more I was warming up to Santa Cruz. So, Oakes just happened to be our last college. And it wasn't just like it was our last college and I was starting to be less upset and more accepting that I definitely wasn't going to my dream school—it was also I just really liked the architecture. A lot of people hate that about Oakes. They hate how it looks like a cabin in the woods with the, I don't know what you'd call that style.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, that's a good question, those kinds of shingles.

Johnston: Yeah, like wood shingles. A lot of people hate that. But for some reason, I was like, this is really cabin in the woodsy. I really liked that. And I was like okay, maybe I could do that. And then I remember I was walking through, I think we were walking through the apartment area and I saw students had put pictures in their windows. Some of them were like popular memes at the time that I liked, or just pictures I recognized. So, I was like okay, this is cool, this is cool.

Then later that night we had dinner with Homayun and his family. And he was kind of asking like, "Oh, so which college are you interested in?"

I was like, "Oh, you know, I saw Oakes today and I really liked it."

And he's like, "Oh my gosh," and then he just went off about how great Oakes was and how he was one of the academic advisors there. I was like wow, that's really cool. And he was telling me if you pick Oakes, you're guaranteed to get it. Not a lot of students pick it. He didn't really go into why, but just kind of left it at that. But knowing that I would know someone there also made me feel more comfortable picking Oakes.

So, there's just a lot of weird things that happened. I just liked the way it looked; Homayun was an advisor there and I knew Homayun a little bit. Homayun made me feel really welcome and like Oakes would be the best choice for me. So, I was like okay, I'm going to do it. So, Oakes was my top choice, actually. And I've never regretted that decision at all. I've loved every second I've been at Oakes.

Vanderscoff: Yeah. I look forward to hearing more about why that is. Maybe we could start with some of your early impressions. And that could be early social experiences

that you're having in the residential spaces, or the core course and that sort of introduction to academics at Santa Cruz—if we could talk a little bit about those early moments at Oakes.

Johnston: Yeah. So early, early moments, definitely Welcome Week. Again, throughout that whole week, that conversation I had with my dad kept ringing through my head: If you want change, then you need to be willing to make changes. So, I was like, all right, let's do it. Let's go to every single Welcome Week activity that they're planning. Even though none of the games or activities sounded fun, I just decided to go to them. I ended up meeting a lot of people from the building. They're all for Oakes students, so I ended up meeting a lot of Oakes students.

I remember it felt a lot like a family. Everyone was welcome there. In the beginning, especially the first week where everyone's trying to be friends and figuring out who their lifelong friends are going to be, there's a lot of knocking on people's doors and just going like, "Hey, we're going to go to dinner. You want to meet us at the lounge in five minutes and we're all just going to go as a group." So, I really pushed myself to do that. I remember having a lot of meals with a lot of people in my hall.

The second night we stayed up in the lounge and we played Mafia, I think. I didn't really know a lot of people in the room. We all were like learning each other's personalities. So that was pretty interesting, just seeing so many people who were trying to be their best person all at once, just kind of interacting and playing Mafia, which is one of the most—like, you don't make friends playing that game, in my opinion. So, I really remember that and being like, oh my gosh, this is incredibly weird. But it was fine. So, I remember a lot about Welcome Week and hanging out with a

bunch of different people. I think, just like everyone, I was kind of looking at people and being like—all right, could I be friends with them? Could I not?

So that was that, and I was just kind of navigating the building. I really don't remember who I would consider my first friend in the building. It was all happening just so fast. And there were so many, like ninety, eighty-five different people I was interacting with, learning new names. So, I really can't say too much about that.

But I remember with my first core class, I had Professor Lindsay Knisley. Oakes' core theme is Communicating Diversity for a Just Society. We hadn't had any summer readings, which is awesome, because I hear now they do summer readings. So, we were one of the last classes that didn't do a summer reading, which I think is awesome. Some people I know now are a little bitter.

But I just remember not knowing what to expect from a class called Communicating Diversity for a Just Society. Didn't fully know what that all meant. Was kind of like, oh, I don't know. But I just remember I went into the class, and I forget what we did; I think we might have written letters to someone. I don't even remember. But something about that class just made me think, like even the first day I was like, this class is awesome. This is so eye-opening. Because the class is very much focused on people of color and their experiences living as a group that has been marginalized and systematically oppressed. It gave me a vocabulary to describe stuff I didn't know I had experienced. There's just a lot of things that we talked about in that class that I didn't totally realize were not okay until I was in that class and seeing it from another perspective and being like—so that's why that made me feel weird when someone did whatever in high school, or made an assumption about me based on my race. So, I was kind of like:

interesting. This is like weird. I just remember that class being so, so eye-opening, and making me feel like yeah, Santa Cruz is awesome. We're going to talk about this all the time and it's going to be amazing.

I also remember on the first day of class, someone in the class, who I later would befriend, came up to me—their name was Inez, I forgot their last name. But they came up to me and they complimented my hair. And throughout Welcome Week, I remember we had made eye contact with each other and kept meaning to say hi. But it was during a lot of ice breakers where you're trying to meet people who are immediately next to you, so there was never an opportunity for us to make our way through the crowds. But we kind of mentioned that, like yeah, I've been trying to say hi to you all week because you seem really cool. And it was again, we both kind of knew the other person was queer. Yeah, my first few weeks was like a lot of finding out who else was queer and who I could be friends with because I didn't have too many queer friends in high school. So, I was getting really excited about meeting more people.

Another friend I made who I still talk to, Dylan Adamo. She sat next to me in core class and she wore these red Doc Martens. And at the time, I was really interested in Doc Martens. So, I remember I just complimented her shoes. And she's like, "Yeah, I've had them since freshman year of high school or something and they've been with me this whole time." And to this day, she still has those shoes. So, it was one of those things I really remember about her. And just being like, okay, this could be interesting. But yeah, those are some of the first closest friends I made.

In terms of the building, the friendships that I made in the building took a little bit longer for me, for whatever reason, I don't know. But those are some of my first impressions, just like wow, this is a really cool place to be in.

Majoring in Sociology

Vanderscoff: Thank you. So, if that's your experience of introduction to this place, I'm wondering if we could then go a little further along into your time here, touching on any important early courses that you had, but also directing some of this into talking about your major. Because we'll spend a lot of time talking about Oakes, particularly when we get to some of your community involvements more recently. So I'm wondering if we could talk about more the academic side of things, pointing towards the major.

Johnston: Yeah. So, one of the non-Oakes core courses I took was Kimberly Lau's *Introduction to the Fairy Tale* course. It's a lower-division literature class. It counted for a GE. I remember seeing the course on the course listing and just being really interested in it. So, I signed up. And then Homayun later told me, "Oh, yeah, Kimberly Lau's the Oakes provost. You should definitely try and say hi to her if you get a chance." So, it was another one of those Homayun connections. It made me again feel better about the course knowing Homayun spoke so highly of this professor.

I remember the first day of class, the first few lectures, we were reading a bunch of these fairy tales: classics, like variations of Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Beauty and the Beast, the original Brothers Grimm; Charles Perrault, maybe? I could be making that name up. So, we were reading a lot of that. And Kim would do, a lot of her lectures were like, from what I remember, the ones that stuck out at least, were

kind of analyzing what we were reading through a feminist critique. I remember thinking that was really cool and interesting. I'd never really, you know, in high school they tell you like, "Oh, yes. We're going to dig deep into like Romeo & Juliet and the implications." But we never took in a feminist point of view, a specific feminist or queer theory point of view. It was just kind of like, we're just going to dig into it and see what we can get. With Kim, it was very structured. It was like fem theory and queer theory and all these different theories. She was looking at these fairy tales through a feminist lens and critiquing them. That just really stood out. I really enjoyed what she had to say. And I was like yeah, that is pretty messed up that Sleeping Beauty is relying on like non-consent; that really stuck out to me.

And then again, there was my core course that I really liked, talking about a lot of social issues. And the third class I took was for the environmental studies major that I was trying out. That was *Bioethics of the 21st Century*. That's taught by two professors, one who is in bio, I think, and the other is a philosophy professor. I remember being in that class and absolutely being bored by the bio side but really interested in the philosophy aspect.

It was more like the humanities, social sciences influence I was more interested in when looking at academics. So, after that quarter, I realized—just being in that bioethics class and realizing who else was going to be in that major—it kind of turned me off a little bit. I just didn't feel as connected to it. So, I went to my advisor, Homayun, and I was like, "Hey, what is like core [course]? Because I just want to keep talking about core. It's been so amazing. I love Lindsay Knisely. I need to be talking more about this stuff, I need to be more engaged with this stuff." And he recommended—just off the top of his head, he was like, "Well, you could look at sociology. You liked Kim's class a lot, so

maybe you want to look at literature." And then I think he also mentioned feminist studies. And his biggest recommendation was for me to just go to the registrar's website and look at all the majors and write down every one that I thought was interesting. And then once I had my list of ones that I thought were interesting, looking at their course descriptions and going through all the upper division electives and writing down which ones I thought were interesting. And then to go back to him and we would from there kind of decide what my classes should be for next quarter.

So, I did that. I went home. And overwhelmingly, I had picked, I'd filled up like two pages of sociology and feminist studies upper-division courses that I was interested in taking. So, I came back and Homayun was like, "This is pretty clear what you're kind of interested in." So, next quarter, Fem 1 was going to be offered. And Sociology 10, *Issues and Problems in America*. So, he's like, "Yeah, definitely try and get into those courses, and then from there you can kind of decide." But the loose plan was, maybe you'll do a double in sociology and feminist studies.

So, I took those courses the winter quarter of my first year. I actually had to crash *Issues and Problems in America* because it was so impacted at the time. I don't know how I was able to get in because I was pretty far down on the wait list. But it worked out; I got into that course. Had a great TA. Really loved that.

And then when I was in Fem Studies, I had Professor [Anjali] Arondekar. And I don't know if you've ever taken a course with Arondekar, but she is one of the toughest professors perhaps on campus. She is no joke. I remember her saying, "This is not going to be an easy course. It's just not going to be easy. You're going to have to really work hard."

And that kind of weeded me out of feminist studies. A lot of the readings were really—it was like Donna Haraway; I don't think we had Judith Butler, I don't think we had Foucault, either, but I remember Donna Haraway and just being like, I have no idea what she is trying to tell me right now. And from there on, it kind of made me just think, maybe Fem Studies isn't for me. I also knew it was a little more theory-based. I just powered through Fem 1. And I was really enjoying Soc 10.

I have not taken another fem class since Arondekar, and that's not because of that experience. I did want to take another one, just because I had heard there are other courses to take that are a little more inviting to non-majors, or intro-y courses. I just never had the chance to.

So, my spring quarter, after I'd survived Fem 1, I was in Soc 1 with Fran Guerra. It was a lot of repeat—having taken Fem 1, it kind of had some overlap with sociology. And that kind of solidified that maybe I don't need to be doing two social sciences majors. There was a lot of overlap for me. I just didn't want that. I wanted more breadth. I was still feeling pressure to do a double major but a quick phone call with my parents and my dad reminded me the double major isn't for everyone. Sometimes you want to put more of your effort into one thing than splitting your effort between two things. And I'm like, "You're right, and I don't have the energy to do two majors, and two senior seminars, senior theses." So, I stuck with sociology but I ended up picking up literature as a minor, because again, I kept taking Kim Lau's classes.

I took one of her classes, and then the TA that I had in her Lit 61 class, the fairy tales one, ended up teaching a course called *Gender in Speculative Fiction*. So, in my second year, I was taking *Gender in Speculative Fiction* and Kim Lau's *The Vampire in Popular*

Culture class. So, at that point, I had three literature classes done. And I was like, I might as well minor in it because you only needed seven courses. So, I was like, you know what? Let's just do it. So that's how I decided on sociology as my major and literature as my minor.

Vanderscoff: And so, following through on sociology then in particular, I'm curious about what some of the key classes were there and whether it proved to have those factors that you were looking at that you'd been so inspired by in Oakes core.

Johnston: Yeah. So, another thing with sociology and picking that course is that I realized in my environmental studies—the one course I took—and then the high school background I had in AP environmental science, I realized what I'd really enjoyed about those were the social aspects of them, like when we were talking about environmental racism and environmental justice, more how it's affecting people. So, when it came to taking sociology classes and then trying to mirror it to what I'd learned in Oakes core, I kind of leaned—I took one course with Deborah Gould called *Social Movements*. And that class is all about the theories behind social movements and looking at contemporary movements, kind of looking at what's happening and perhaps why they are working, why they aren't working. How is social media affecting these social movements? Is it having a big impact?

That course definitely spoke more to what I'd learned in core and what I was interested in with environmental studies in general. But truth be told, that was probably one of the only classes I really took that had that implication. The other courses I took—one course I substituted, which was Phil Longo's *Queer History of the United States*. And that was just because it interested me personally, so I was like, I'm just going to take it. It will be

interesting. And then, with the other courses, I took a lot of Wendy Martyna's courses. And she teaches really interesting courses. So, I took *Language and Society, Social Psychology,* and *Death and Dying* with her. None of those really had too much of a social justice sort of implication. But I don't know, they just were interesting to me.

I think with core and like my interest in what core was—I did more of that work in my extracurriculars than in my academics. My academics were more about: oh, this sounds interesting, I'll take this class. Or like, this is really cool. Less to do with social justice specifically, and just more like, this class sounds cool. I'll take it.

Vanderscoff: Because one dynamic that you describe in that Oakes class is that it was giving you this new material to reflect *out* with, but also to reflect *in* with. In other words, that it was making you think about yourself in different ways, or reconsidering your own biography, or things that had happened to you in the past. And that was a big part of your spark for sociology in the first place, right?

Johnston: Mm hmm.

Vanderscoff: So I guess I'm curious then how that developed—like, the material in terms of your own relationship to it—or whether there seemed to be this ability to relate it to our own life, or relate it out, and if that mattered. Like how those priorities for you, I guess, shifted in your educational time.

Johnston: Well, like I said, academically it really didn't have a huge impact. Actually, I guess that's not true. Because in discussion, sometimes topics would be brought up, and it became more important for me to speak up about my own experiences in my own

communities and challenging what some other students might have to say. But ultimately, I wouldn't say that was a huge part of my educational career.

What I did more of was joining organizations that focused on my identities and my own experiences just growing up and like just being a person in the world. I had more of a focus on joining things and doing that, rather than sitting in a classroom and talking about it. Not that there's no value in sitting in a classroom and talking about it. It's just, for whatever reason I ended up doing more extracurriculars. So, joining Practical Activism was my first big step. I can talk more about that if you want.

Vanderscoff: Yeah. I'd love to talk some more about that. But I think once we get there then that will lead us off into other directions. But I guess for staying on-theme with sociology, just to be sure we don't miss something important there—

Johnston: Yeah. I mean, I'm pretty quiet in the classrooms, is what I'll say. I don't tend to speak out as much on what's happening. I'm more of a silent eye roller, like I can't believe someone is saying this, I hope someone else says something. Which was interesting, because in core I wouldn't say I was like that. I was definitely more vocal and willing to challenge my peers. But in other settings, in other classes at least, I didn't tend to take on that role. I think a lot of that had to do with being intimidated by my other peers, just a lot of them being older than me, having more experience in the university. A lot of them just seemed get the material much more than I did, whereas I was struggling and I was like, I don't know how you're understanding Foucault right now. I don't understand a drop of this. So, I chose not to speak up as much in the classroom just for that. And then just in writing—again, the courses I took didn't really

require me to reflect too much inwardly, I suppose. So, in my writing for classes, it didn't really come up too much.

The application of core, why I was interested in sociology came up later. I can't really think of anything within sociology too much. There's definitely moments, but nothing impactful? I don't know if that's the word.

Vanderscoff: Well before we get into discussing then some of your areas of community engagement and advocacy then, another way of getting at sociology is, so if you started out with this experience of trying to work with the learning curve and trying to understand people like Foucault and the content—more recently, what are some classes that have particularly sparked you? Or where do you see your interest in the material really clicking?

Johnston: More recently, it was actually not even a sociology class. It was a literature class, again with Kimberly Lau. I took it last quarter. It was her *Culture and Politics of Virtual Worlds* class. Actually, I did ask for it to count for my major, or I had it petitioned as a course substitution for sociology, so it technically kind of is sociology, but it's listed in the literature department. That course actually I would say I did speak out in more. That was just a very special case. I think it was like I knew Kim, so I felt comfortable engaging a little bit more. The readings, they were difficult. We still had Donna Haraway and I think we had Judith Butler. I don't remember. Maybe we didn't have Butler. We had Butler in another class that I just took. There were three difficult readings, I remember, in the beginning of the course. But she had reading questions for us that helped probe thinking and to think about the cases. So those really helped. But I guess growing as a scholar-academic, I don't feel like I've ever gotten to a point where

I'm reading something and I feel like I've reached complete understanding. A lot of theory, in my opinion—it's filled with a lot of jargon and it's filled with a lot of—I don't know. Sometimes it feels very academic elitist. Which, being in a university, like just being in it, you're like academically elitist, I guess. Or it can feel that way. It was just like if my professor can explain this in a sentence, why are you spending twenty-five pages on this? I don't know—I've never—I don't think I've ever reached a point of hey, I actually get this. There's been a couple of times. But for the most part, some of the bigger stuff has been like, oh my gosh, you're using this word in a way I've never even seen it used before or something. I don't know.

Vanderscoff: So if that theoretical material never seemed to be the most direct or efficient or logical approach, what sort of materials or experiences, for that matter, in terms of the classes you've had here, have connected more directly with you?

Johnston: I'd say more of the stuff that focuses on lived experiences and research studies. Those make a lot of sense to me. I think it's because they're more of an application of theory. Well, in the cases of research, it's more of an application, building groundwork for why these theories take place. So, reading research was actually pretty easy for me and interesting, because I liked seeing what people were finding and the implications they were making from their findings. And then, in some courses we'd have our theory pieces, but we would also have more pieces that reflected someone's experience based on what we were talking about. I can't think of a specific example at the moment, but those pieces just really made a lot of sense to me. I don't—those pieces just felt more real to me because I could understand—they were just talking about themselves and like what they were doing. I think, again, that is how it connected with core. We talked a lot about ourselves and our experiences. Like yeah, we read some

theory, but for the most part, we were learning about ourselves and talking about ourselves. So, in reading those pieces, there was a little bit of that. It just made more sense to be reading that material than a bunch of theory. I understood why we were reading the theory, and it never bothered me—it never truly, truly bothered me. Just like it was more frustrating and I was having a hard time with it. But usually lectures could clear that up for me and TAs. So, I relied heavily on those materials—research, personal anecdotes that were sometimes provided, like biographies, autobiographies of people—material like that was really what stood out and really made me be like, oh my gosh, this is amazing. This is incredible. Those were the readings that really made me think, wow, what this person is saying is really important and cool. Theory rarely ever made me stop and think like that.

Peer Advising

Vanderscoff: That's great. Of course, one of the hopes of this project is taking an oral history approach to where students are at, I think that's one of our goals, that kind of connection. So, one final question about sociology. I have in my notes that you are a peer advisor—

Johnston: Yes.

Vanderscoff: —in the department. And so, I'm curious if you wouldn't mind just sharing how you started doing that, and then explain a little bit about what you do in that position.

Johnston: Okay. My second year I was a mentor for Oakes' core class. So, I had two mentees. We would meet up, talk about core. My job was to help them navigate their

first quarter at university, especially one so large as UC Santa Cruz. And after having that experience, I realized I really like helping people. I really like talking about academics. I really like helping students navigate the university, pick classes, refer them to resources. It was something I enjoyed and I felt I had a natural knack for. So, from there, I looked for more opportunities where I could do that. And also, in that regard, I sort of realized well, I'm studying sociology. What am I going to do with this degree? And I always figured, oh, if I study what I love, something will come together. And for me, thankfully, it did. So, I kind of felt like who in my life has done this for me? And I immediately thought of my high school guidance counselor. Her name was Mrs. Cool. She *was* cool. I thought of her and I was like yeah, I want to be just like her. I want to be a guidance counselor in high school.

So, I started trying to just look around, see what kind of jobs were around in the education field, like tutoring, mentoring, whatever. And it wasn't until my third year that I found an opportunity that was speaking to what I wanted to do. It was mentoring for the Stevenson 26, *Navigating the Research University* class. So I applied for that job. Didn't get it. But when the person who interviewed me, I believe her name was Stacy, she emailed me back and was just like, "I think you'd be a better fit for a peer advising position that my colleague Sean Malone is setting up. I'll forward him your information so that when the job is posted, you can apply."

I'm like okay, so I got rejected, but I also have another opportunity. That job didn't get posted until spring quarter of my third year. I was like all right, I'm going to apply. So, I applied for it, interviewed, got that job. And the peer advising with Sean Malone was campus-wide. So, the peer advisors that he hired didn't work in specific offices. We worked in different colleges. It just kind of depended on where we were needed, which

office was needing more support than others. This year I actually have a permanent base in Oakes, so I'm working at Oakes. Having that experience with peer advising, it's like, that's really cool.

And then Tina sent out her email for, oh, sociology's looking for peer advisors for next year. And I was like, can I be a peer advisor? Can I do both? So I talked to Sean and he was like, "Yeah, I don't really care if you're working as a peer advisor in two different departments." Because what Sean does focuses more on the colleges, whereas Tina's is more on the major.

So I applied for that position and I got it. And again, it was coming out of wanting to be a high school guidance counselor. But this year, just being more in the college offices, a college office and then the department office, I kind of realized, maybe I want to do academic advising at higher education. So that was a little bit of a turn. But in both jobs, in being a peer advisor, we do a lot of—in some ways it could be considered triage advising, where we're figuring out students' questions, what they need, and if we can help them or if they need to talk to Tina in the sociology department. We also have our own advising hours so students can come in and ask us questions. Usually the stuff we can answer is we can do two-year plans for folks. We can do grad checks; we can help them pick classes.

Picking classes is actually a tricky one, because they always want your opinion if you've taken the class. So, students are always asking like, "Oh, so you took this class. What did you think of it?" And it's like, "I want to give you my opinion, but I also want you to take it and decide for yourself." So, complex, trying to be like, "It's an amazing class. But also, maybe you should just go and try it for yourself." So, you do that.

We answer questions about the wait list. We have a lot of stuff. Tina, usually, she can take on the more difficult cases where students maybe need—difficult doesn't mean like bad. But it can mean like study abroad. We don't work really with study abroad. But Tina, she knows more about that. So, she'll take on study abroad. She'll take on permission codes, general life advice. Students always come in and they're like, "I don't know what I want to do with my life and I need to talk to Tina because I think she might be able to help." And it's like, "Yeah, yeah, you do that." Because as a peer advisor, we're just there to do some of the smaller stuff that's more in our scope.

So that's kind of what we do there. It's kind of the same at Oakes. But since Oakes is a college advising office, it's more about general education than major requirements and what not.

Also, something cool that I do at the sociology offices. We have, for when it's slow, which usually happens after weeks three through about seven, it gets pretty slow. So we have our project areas. My project area is cataloging old theses. So, we have all the theses from back when the university opened up until, as current as last quarter. So, it's been my job to look through, only the physical copies that we have—it's been my job to look at the physical copies, skim them and then enter keywords. That's been interesting because you're getting to see what people were writing about before you were here, like even before you were born. And it's just really interesting seeing oh, this person was talking about this topic, and then later on this person talked about the same topic. But it's years apart and these people probably didn't know each other. But it's just interesting seeing the similar topics come up, people's different takes on them. Seeing how candid some people write in an academic paper. That's been a very interesting

experience, getting to catalog these and go through them and read up on what people had been talking about.

Vanderscoff: Topically, you must just be looking at a huge range of subjects.

Johnston: Oh, yeah. There's everything from economics to—because sociology can kind of be mixed in with everything. So, there's stuff about the economics of very specific places. I've seen a lot on the economics in, I'm trying to think of the last one I did. I think it was in Nigeria, maybe? I don't know. But it's just like the economic development in Nigeria and how it was influenced by the military regimes in these countries. And then you'll have stuff that have more general questions, like should men care about how women's bodies work? And it will just be a study on that. There's a lot of education, a lot of child development; a lot of people talk about drug abuse. Yeah. It's pretty interesting. Lots on sexual assaults as well. There's just so much in these theses. And it's just so interesting being able to read them, well, I don't read all of them, but skim them and kind of pick out the big concepts.

Vanderscoff: It's also a great example of how some of jobs, or your work here feeds back into your academic studies as well. So this actually gives us a pretty good bridge to start talking about some of your college involvement and community involvement. Unless you think there's something else about sociology that you might like to say, either in terms of the work you're doing now or anything like that before we sort of switch back to Oakes more?

Johnston: I can't think of anything.

Peer Advising at Oakes College

Vanderscoff: Great, that's fine. I still have a lot of questions about Oakes. So maybe the way we can do this, we can slide right over into peer advising in Oakes. There's a quote I pulled, which is yours, which is, "I plan on making the language of the university accessible to everyone. The language of this university was written and not meant for everyone. I'm here to help tear down that barrier for students who are like and unlike myself." So, I think that's a great quote and I'm wondering if you could just explain that quote a little further, what you mean about those questions of the language of the university and accessibility, and then relate that to the work that you do.

Johnston: I think I wrote that right after I had done a training with Sarah Radoff, the academic preceptor at Oakes. She'd gotten all the peer advisors together for one day in the summer. We did this, I don't know, nine-hour training. It was a really long day. And she had been talking about the language of the university and accessibility. So that's where that quote comes from. But it also made me think of how many of my friends have asked me for help with their academic plan. There's just a lot they just weren't understanding. Then they would come to me for help because I had more, not just in being a peer advisor, but also, I'm not a first-generation student, so I had my parents to also help me read over a lot of these forms and a lot of like oh, what does this mean versus what does that mean. What I meant in that quote was me using my privilege to help folks who don't have that privilege, and to help them understand it for themselves as well.

That's another thing I remember I learned in my training with Sarah. She was very big on we *are* here to help students, but we shouldn't just be helping them. We should be

teaching them ways that they can also be advocates for themselves, and how they can do these things for themselves. Not because we don't want to see them, but because it will help them learn and grow on their own as students. So, that's where I was coming from. I want to help students and I want to teach them what these things mean.

What I mean by the language of the university not being accessible—it can be very technical language. It has a lot of university jargon in it. And that's not something everyone grows up around or even is totally aware of. So sometimes it can be really confusing for folks. One of my goals is to make it the least confusing as possible, and just to explain it in the simplest form that I can, using the most accessible language.

Vanderscoff: When it comes to the day in and day out of that job, you already talked about this a little bit, but if you wouldn't mind just saying a little bit more about stories about the sorts of problems that you see people come in with, and then what sort of solutions you try to connect them with.

Johnston: So for the college advising offices, you don't see a lot of third and fourth years. Once you're a third and fourth year, you're mostly with your major advisor. So, with the colleges, we see a lot of first and second years. And their biggest issue isn't so much language of the university. It is just getting into classes and figuring out GEs that they want to take that are interesting. So that's one of the biggest issues we see. When a student comes in wondering what classes are still available, there are still ways that I try to teach them how to do it on their own. Like one, just searching all open classes on the [computer] search. Or teaching them how they can search by general education requirement. And then also explaining to them that in the "My UCSC" search for classes, there's a lot of outdated GEs that are still in there. So just kind of explaining,

ignore those. Focus only on the ones that you see on your advising list. Also, a lot of them come in asking, "Am I going to be on track to graduate? What GEs do I have to complete?" So that's just showing them where their advising report is. "Here's how you get to your advising report. And from here, if this is collapsed, it means it's complete. If it has a yellow warning triangle on it, that means you still have to take it." It's supposed to show you if you're in progress of a class, but I've never had it do that. So, I tell them – you know, just stuff like that. I think that's the biggest thing.

Another thing would be financial aid. But since I'm not really a financial aid advisor, I don't have a lot to say on that. When they come and talk about financial aid, I just tell them, "I think you're going to have to go to financial aid for that." And just showing them where they can find their financial aid advisor on the financial aid website. Mostly just helping them navigate where they need to be going. A lot of the students just assume that their academic advisor can do everything, like their academic advisor can lift holds on their account. So, it's also explaining no, the hold wasn't placed on your account by the Academic Advising Office. They cannot lift it. Only the office that placed it there can lift it. Again, that ties in with the financial aid because there's a lot of financial aid holds that get placed. So, students come in like, "Oh, I need a hold lifted." And it's like okay, "Well, who placed the hold?" And a lot of the times it's oh, financial aid. "Okay, I'm sorry but you're going to have to go to financial aid. Or you can call them."

Those are the biggest problems. But in my opinion, they're not too big. I haven't seen a lot of drastic stuff. I think the advisors take on more of what they call the complicated cases. We take on the more—I guess what they would consider simple cases of just choosing classes, majors, how to do a grad check.

Vanderscoff: Well, so on the one hand, that division of labor that you described might be true. But then, on the other hand, you're also describing here a system which has some complication, right? It has its own signs and it has holes that are coming potentially from multiple campus offices, that sort of a thing. What sort of experience have you had yourself in terms of navigating the system? I'm curious what you draw on as far as your personal experience in this role as a peer advisor, because you also have been in the position of making sense of all that.

Johnston: That's interesting to think about. I know I didn't learn it all overnight. It was definitely stuff I picked up. And I don't exactly remember how. I think Homayun taught me a lot of it. I saw him a few times during my first year, other than the time where it was just like please help me figure out my major. I think he showed me how to find my advising report. So, for me, it was learning from others, other academic advisors, and him just showing me and then kind of remembering how to do that.

One of the biggest things, probably, for me, was navigating wait lists for classes. Because it feels like you mess up one thing and then all of a sudden, you're out. You're off the wait list, you've lost your spot, and now you're back at the bottom. I guess it was learning, if anything needs to be changed with your wait list, just call the registrar and they'll help you troubleshoot that. So, I guess just how I'm teaching other students, I was taught by my own academic advisors. I mostly did a lot of reaching out to them. I think my biggest thing my first year was getting in all my requirements. It was knowing how to look for those and searching for those on their own. I actually don't even remember how I learned how to do that. I don't think it was on my own. I think it was through some maybe email we got from advising or something.

Vanderscoff: I think that answers the question. Unless there's anything else you'd like to say about peer advising, my next question is about another key area you've been involved in in terms of the Oakes community, which is being an NA [Neighborhood Assistant].

Johnston: Yeah, I can't think of anything with peer advising.

Residential Assistant at Oakes College

Vanderscoff: Great. So then as far as being an NA, this actually might give us an opportunity to connect the circle on some of the things that you were talking about in terms of your arrival at Oakes and seeking out friendships and then also finding your place in the residence hall. So, I'm wondering if we could circle back to there, and you could talk a little bit more about your residential experience at Oakes, trying to locate yourself here and then locate yourself in a community here.

Johnston: [I was interested] in being a neighborhood assistant just out of the job perks and that it pays—the accommodations for the job are very nice, accommodated housing and a meal plan. But the more I got involved with Oakes and the more I got to know it, the less it was about the accommodations and the more it was about wanting to give back to a community that had done so much for me. Specifically, wanting to give back what Jessica, my own NA, had given to me—that sense of safety and that sense of it was okay to be out in college. That's something I wanted to give to other incoming first years. That was incredibly important to me when I finally did get the job.

I applied for it, actually, twice. The first time was in my first year, trying to get it for my second year. I didn't get it then. I forgot to follow up with the CRAs on my improvables.

I think that mostly led down to—I didn't have enough involvement in the Oakes community yet. I had tried out senate, but didn't really think it was my space. It seemed like a popularity contest, in a way, which I think a lot of student governing things can be, or just anything in general can be like popularity contests. So just feeling already on the outside of that, it wasn't something I wanted to work towards getting more involved with, if that makes sense. So, I kind of dropped that.

Becoming a neighborhood assistant really became about being there for other incoming queer students. And when I interviewed for the job a second time, I said that flat out. I was like, "I am here to—I know a lot of students say this—but I am here to give back to the community. Specifically, I want to give back to the queer students." And at that time, I had also—with Jessica we had created a queer peer support group that is called EQUAL, which stands for Engaging Queer Understanding and Leadership. We had started that at Oakes and it was specifically an Oakes group for queer Oakes students to know each other and bond, meet each other, be in a supportive space, and also build up leadership. So, we had that space and I connected that back in my interview. I was just like, "I've been doing this work already with queer students. And I'm just trying to do more of that, because I think it's important for students to know that it's okay to be out."

At the time, for whatever reason, there had been this stereotype of Oakes College that it wasn't friendly toward the LGBT community. That personally hadn't been my own experience and I didn't want other queer students to come in thinking that that would be theirs. So, for me, it became really, really important to be out and to be visible so that students who were coming in, who were queer, could project themselves onto me and really see themselves in a leadership role, and know that even if they didn't later pursue

leadership, they could know, "Someone else like me is in this role, I could do it too if I wanted." That's really what became important to me. It's why I chose the residential halls, which cater towards first years, and it's also why I chose the LGBT-themed living space. And it's also why I chose it again a second year. It was still very important for me to be there for first years, specifically, because of how positively impacted I had been by my own NA, who had shared her experiences with me.

Vanderscoff: And before we get a little further into the NA position, I'd love to hear more about the story of EQUAL, where the idea came from, and then the story of creating that space.

Johnston: All right. So, it was my second year, Jessica's fourth and last year. Over summer that year I was an OWL, which is an Oakes Welcome Leader. They work during Welcome Week and are essentially program coordinators for one week. Jessica had stepped down from being an NA and switched to being a CA, which is our community assistants. They are the ones who really put on Welcome Week. The OWLs and the CAs work really closely together. And I remember she had wanted to do a National Coming Out Day program. She wanted that to be one of her first programs. It was also coming up in October. And my second year, we all started a week later than usual, so it was coming up really fast. It was going to be the second week. We had been planning it together and we had been sitting out at the Oakes amphitheater. We had been kind of talking about that, and I had been expressing my frustration with not being able to meet a lot of queer students at Oakes and how I knew that they were out there, just like, we hadn't been connected. And Jessica was like, "No, you're totally right. That's definitely a real feeling." It's hard to find other Oakes people who are also

queer, and especially Oakes being a college that serves people of color, it was even harder to find queer people of color.

So, we'd been, I guess, lamenting on that. And I was just talking to her like oh my gosh, I'd just spent the summer at home. My family had started attending PFLAG, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. So, we'd been attending that. I'd been part of their youth program and that was a supportive space for high school students, for the most part, queer high school students. I was sharing that with her, how I really liked that space and how I'd seen it help a lot of folks, so I wanted to bring that to Oakes, but with its own thing. And she was like, "Oh my God, yes. We need that."

So, she did a lot more of the work. We met up more and talked more about what we wanted from the group and what not. But ultimately, it was pretty casual. Since she was a CA, she talked to our college programs coordinator, who at the time was Desiree Morton. And Desiree was more than happy to support this group. So, Jessica did a lot of the bringing it up. The name was her thing as well. I failed completely at trying to come up with a name, but she came up with EQUAL and the acronym and then got the space. And from there, it kind of just became its thing.

We had trouble finding a space where we wanted it to be held. For a little bit, we were informally holding it in the Oakes Library and kicking students out, which is always awkward. I remember the first day we set up the chairs and we were just sitting down. And the meeting starts at 7:30 and we're kind of looking at our watches. And she just turns to me. She's like, "Oh my gosh, what if no one shows up?" And I was like, "You know what, if no one shows up, no one shows up. We try again next week. We can't give up. We can be bummed, but we've got to try."

She's like, "You're right. You're right." And then 7:30 hits and slowly people start coming in. It wasn't a whole bunch of people. It was maybe five other students. But still, pretty good. They all came in and we had our first meeting, kind of introduced what Jessica and I had envisioned and our purpose. And from there, it started.

Once Jessica graduated, I wanted it to be a continuing thing. So, I made sure it got brought into my second year. Especially being an NA really helped me make sure that space could still be here. So, I did it again. Advertised. Our first meeting in my second year, we actually had our own space. We weren't still kicking people out of the library. We'd reserved the Merrill Room. And we had filled up the Merrill Room with people. It's not a huge space, but going from five people to about fifteen, twenty, was just incredible to me. It made me feel really validated, like this space is definitely needed, and it's going to do a lot.

So, it's been going on since then. Right now, I've taken a step back from facilitating and doing the meetings and I've been trying to pass it on to other students so that it will live past myself. I think that will be the biggest triumph is that if it can last past me, I'll know I did a good job somewhere along the line. So, yeah. That's the journey, I guess, of EQUAL.

Vanderscoff: So you mentioned that a big part of the drive for this was trying to get more connectivity and conversation in the queer community at Oakes, in particular, the queer community of color. And so, when you think about EQUAL, what sort of steps do you think it made in that regard, in terms of that visibility and that community?

Johnston: I think just being a space made it its own visibility. Like just knowing that it was there, and having the support of our pro staff who are more than willing to put it

on the Oakes website, or were more than willing to put in on the program's app that we use. That really helped the advertising, it just really establishing itself as a name. Because a lot of students, I found out, know about the group. Don't necessarily go, but they know. So, for me, that says a lot, in terms of—people know about us, they know we're here, they know we're taking up our space that we need. And then, in terms of programming, this is just our third year. It's still a very new group. There's still a lot of figuring out a little bit more of what we want to do, realizing certain things that we're doing may not be sustainable for longer periods of time. So, we're working on becoming more active with programming and advertising publicity, in particular.

Last year and this year, we've been part of the Pride stop at Oakes, Kresge Pride's thing. Usually Rachel Carson and Oakes will put together a stop. But when they found out we existed, they were like "Oh, we'll invite EQUAL to do that." And that's just been something that's been happening. We have been getting invites from folks to do socials, do programs with them. I feel like it's definitely a known thing. The Cantu [Resource Center] has reached out to us. Various other queer groups on campus have reached out and just like been, "Hey, you want to do a social with us? Here's the time and place. It's just going to be a potluck, low-key."

So, we have definitely been connecting, not just towards the Oakes community, but towards UC Santa Cruz as a whole. I feel like it's definitely known who and what we are. We've definitely gained more visibility as the years have progressed. Again, the biggest thing, just it being at Oakes and having this space there, just helps. Even if students aren't going, they know they have a space.

Vanderscoff: And one funny little follow-up question, you mentioned one of the ways in which you've gotten the word out about this organization is through the programs app that Oakes had. I didn't know there was a programs app over there. I'm curious if you could talk about that and then talk a little bit about outreach.

Johnston: Yeah. So, the programs app is—it's just through Guidebooks, and actually, all the colleges use it. It is new. I think they might have tried it last year, but this year they're trying to get it more established. So, it's just Guidebook. It has a calendar in it, so each day you can see what's going on around campus; what's going on just around Oakes. So yeah, we just got established on that app, although I don't know if it's been updated since fall quarter. I know people have been really excited to use it this year, but I don't know how much follow-up has happened since after fall.

But yeah, that's been outreach. We've done flyering. We have a group on Facebook. So, kind of just various—word of mouth. I find word of mouth works the best.

Welcome Week is one of our most crucial weeks to get members because it's a time when all first-years are figuring out what groups they want to join. So, it's super important for us to be visible, to be talking about it, and also to get fliers and posters up before students move in, to have their NAs well-versed on our mission, so that the NAs can talk about it. I think it worked for Oakes, at least. It's a very word-of-mouth community, so just making sure people who are going to be talking about it know how to talk about it.

Vanderscoff: All right. And so then, before we move to talking about some of your work with, say, Practical Activism and some of that, I'm curious if there's anything

further you'd like to say about being an NA at Oakes, and working to create the sort of community that made you feel so welcome in the first place.

Johnston: Being a neighborhood assistant is definitely one of the more eye-opening experiences. You're working with eighty-five different people. Eighty-five different personalities are all blending together in a building and it's not going to be every year that they all blend well. Last year was my first year as an NA and I had one of the toughest years I've ever had, just in school. Even this year as an NA, I don't think this year's been easier as a neighborhood assistant because I did it last year; I think it's the group that has also been easier to work with. You learn a lot being in this position because you have to navigate different personalities. And you just have to be very okay with people not liking you. And that, I think, was really challenging for me at first. I don't think anyone wants to be disliked. I think that's kind of fair to say. So just knowing that some people don't like you is hard. And then having been a resident, knowing—I talked, like me and my friends from other buildings, we talked about our NAs all the time. We were gossiping about them. You're in this role where a lot of people know you, regardless of whether you know them. You're an easy person to talk about. You're an easy target. So, I realized I had to be very comfortable with having people say stuff behind my back. And I was just like, you know what? I wouldn't say I'm comfortable with it, but it's just something I had to come to terms with in regard to this job. And also sort of ignore this residual paranoia I had from high school, being one of the gay kids and knowing people might have been talking about me behind my back. So, it just kind of brought that up again, just these feelings of oh, people are talking behind my back. I guess I've just grown to know that like that's probably never going to stop in life. But I think it's definitely highlighted in this position.

At the same time, it's really fun. I love working with first-years. They're still excited about being in school, or being in university. They're still trying to figure stuff out. So, it's really fun being there because you do get to take on a more supportive role for them. You're not there to be their friend but sometimes you end up becoming friends with them. That's a really rewarding experience, in my opinion, especially when they're coming to you with really big problems. It kind of makes you feel a little bit like wow, I must have been doing my job correctly because you feel like you can talk to me.

Vanderscoff: When it comes to being an NA—so I was an RA when I was here, right, and there's these different parts of the job. There's the kind of programming part of the job. Then there's the policy part of the job. Then there's questions of health and safety, right, Mental or otherwise. So I'm curious for you, then, just in terms of your own approach to the job, how you struck a balance between those different things, in answer to whatever the key issue seems to have been with those first-years.

Johnston: First-years? I'd say the biggest challenge with them is policy, maintaining university policy. A lot of them are coming from the space of: "I just moved out, I don't want anyone telling me what to do." And a lot of them feel entitled to their spaces because they're like, "Well, I'm paying for it." Forgetting that they signed a contract saying, "Yes, you paid for it, but you also agreed not to smoke weed in your room. And you're mad that I'm now telling you you can't do that, and you got caught." So that's the biggest struggle. And for me, sometimes it's those residents that you really like that you have to be documenting. And it's just like—it's really hard because you know, you can tell sometimes they really thought because they were close with you, that you wouldn't document them, and they thought oh, I get the friend treatment. And it's like, "No, you're still my resident. And at the end of the day, we're not here to be friends.

We're here to make sure the community is safe. Even if you don't think smoking marijuana is unsafe, you don't know who else in the building is here and what their experiences are with this substance. So, we just need to be cautious of that." That's one of the more difficult things you have to deal with.

And another challenge just being a neighborhood assistant is the balance between school, socializing, and the building, and sleep. There's just so many things you have to juggle. I rarely see that the people who get hired are the people who aren't involved. The neighborhood assistants I know are all very, very involved in a lot of other extracurriculars. So, sometimes you have to choose your priorities. Like what is on your number one? Is it your extracurriculars; is it your building? Is it your school? Is it sleep? Is it socializing? You're kind of juggling these all around and it can get really overwhelming really fast. That was another thing I struggled with a little bit in my first year as a neighborhood assistant, on top of just, like I kind of mentioned before, having a pretty difficult building. It was just difficult to be balancing all of that and still trying to, I don't know, have fun, have a good time. But also, being a role model for students. I think that's something every RA or NA has to deal with, is finding a balance between everything that they're involved with. There are some that do it really well and there are some that don't, who ultimately neglect their building. That sucks for their residents, but it happens. And I've seen it happen.

Vanderscoff: So then, for you personally, with that mix of responsibilities and then also just being a student with a social life and all the rest of it, what sort of practices or resources have you found in terms of self-care?

Johnston: Personally, I haven't reached out to a lot of resources. EQUAL has been a big support. I reach out more towards friend support than professional support. In the past, I have gone towards professional self-care with therapy. But more recently things that I do is just hanging out with friends. Getting off campus. That's a huge thing. I think UC Santa Cruz is a bubble, so it's important for me to get out of that bubble and just to be outside and just remember like there's life outside of this university. It's a big university, but at the same time, it's really small. So that's just something I do, is just trying to get out of it and really make time for myself, which can be hard. But that's what I do. sometimes the other NAs and I will get together and talk about what we're dealing with, and just be like, "Oh my gosh, I'm so glad you can relate. Like I'm not glad that you can relate, but at the same time, I'm glad I'm not the only one."

The City of Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: And then another related question there, so if downtown is kind of an outlet for you, maybe you could say a little bit more about the relevance of off-campus life in your time as a student here.

Johnston: Downtown, it's just that strip for me. I don't do too much else.

Vanderscoff: Pacific Avenue, you mean.

Johnston: Yeah, Pacific Avenue, just walking down there. Despite being in a beach town, I don't like the beach, so the beach is not my personal outlet. Sometimes it's going to friends' houses. But for the most part, off-campus life isn't such a huge impact. It's just a space that's there when I need to get off campus. Also, having friends who have cars is really awesome. I don't need to go super far away from Santa Cruz, but

sometimes it is nice to just go to the Target and be in a Target sometimes. I don't know. It's more just an outlet. I don't participate in a lot of activities. I sometimes go to a midnight movie there, but it's not like my go-to thing, yeah, like my thing I do in downtown is I go to the midnight movie.

Vanderscoff: And before we come to concluding questions, I wanted to be sure that we talk about your role with Practical Activism, and then also the Queer and Trans People of Color Conference. So, starting with Practical Activism, if you could just share a little bit about your involvement in that.

Johnston: Okay. So, Practical Activism, that also goes back to my first year. I joined it because my RA was part of it. Again, Jessica, she was part of it. And she had kind of roped in a lot of her residents into joining Practical Activism. When you join it, if you're going to do it the whole time that you could do it, you would join your spring quarter of your first year. So, it was my spring quarter of my first year. And I still found that I was struggling a little bit figuring out my place, totally. I knew I liked Oakes; I knew I had friends, but I was still missing the closeness I wanted. So, for me it was like okay, I'll join Practical Activism; it's a way to get new people; Jessica's been speaking really highly of it; I went to the conference and it was really cool. And you know what, it will get my feet wet with activist work. So that was kind of my reasons for joining.

So, I went in, did it, spring of my first year, fall quarter of my second year. Put on my first conference. Saw the speakers that we brought, the keynote, the spoken word. I only got to see my workshop that year. I didn't get to see anyone else's, which is pretty typical of working conferences. I remember having some frustrations with it. Planning a conference is a lot of difficult work and I think, to some extent, I felt like it was more

than I could handle, like I had taken on more than I could do. So, once I was done, I was just like, I am not going to do that again. I was just like so set on it. But I had talked with some friends, and at that point I had made a lot of friends from Colleges Nine and Ten, as well as the other Oakes students who had joined. We had just been talking about Practical Activism and we were all like, "Oh, who's going to do it again?" There weren't too many people who actually wanted to do it again. But one of my friends, **Jenna Melville** got it into my head that we should try and be co-leads together, which was pretty ambitious for being two second-years who've only been part of the conference for a year. It was pretty ambitious. But we were both like, you know what? I think we could do it well. We vibe well together; I think our work styles would match. I think we could do this and we could do it really well.

So, I was like okay, I'll do it. We'll do it again. So, I emailed Wendy Baxter, and said okay, I'm interested in joining Practical Activism again, and I'm interested in leadership. So, she emailed me back, "That's amazing. Let's set up an interview." And from there, we did an interview and neither myself nor Jenna got the co-lead role. It went to two folks who had done it for two years, I think, and were coming up on their last year. So, they were co-leads and I took over one of the area groups for the conference, which was special sessions. Which was a group that focused on making, I wouldn't call them mini workshops, but kind of pop-up booths. Each one focused on different social issues that had a creative, active component to go along with them. That's for folks for when they're going through the conference to kind of look at and view. So, I did that. I took over that group.

Again, it was another one of those things. When I got done with it I was like, oh my gosh, I cannot do another Practical Activism. This is just too much work. I'm so over it.

And that was like me fall quarter of my third year. And I was just like, I'm not going to do it again. And I told all my friends, "If you hear me talking about Practical Activism and even thinking of doing it, just remind me how frustrated I was with it." And they were just like, "Okay, we'll remember that."

Of course, spring quarter rolls around, Wendy sends out the email like, "Oh, who's interested?" At first, I was like, oh, I'm just going to ignore it, I'm just going to ignore it. And then I think I had a couple friends text me like, "Oh, are you going to try and go for the co-lead position again?" And I was just like, "I don't know."

And then, I really thought about it. It was like, you know what? I started my career at UC Santa Cruz part of Practical Activism and I really want to end my career at UC Santa Cruz with Practical Activism. So, I emailed Wendy a little bit late, and I was like, "Hey, Wendy, I'm interested in Practical Activism and I'm interested in being co-lead."

So again, it was the same thing. "Let's do an interview." And this year for Practical Activism we had three co-leads instead of two. It just worked out that way. Most years it's two. But she said in the past there's been a few years where she has had three co-leads. So, it was actually all three of the colleges that are part of Practical Activism ended up representing. So, we had a College Ten affiliate, a College Nine affiliate, and then myself, an Oakes affiliate.

And I did the same thing that Jessica had done. I roped in a bunch of my residents to get them involved. From there, yeah, we put that conference together—the 14th annual Practical Activism Conference. Going from being a planner, to being an area group lead, to being a co-lead is a really interesting experience. Because being a planner, you're working on your workshop; your focus is your workshop. You're just working on

putting that together and it's one of ten workshops. So, it's not all on you, in a way. The biggest stress of doing your workshop is just doing the research for it and making sure you're well-versed, and making sure your speaker is going to be good and not boring, I guess. (laughter) So that's one of the biggest challenges. When you're an area group lead, you're also planning a workshop, but you're also in charge of this area group. That's difficult because there are so many people who are not good at checking their email and are not super prompt. Myself included. But it was just incredibly frustrating trying to work with these people and trying to get them to do stuff on time. It was also incredibly challenging because a lot of my friends had chosen to be part of the area group that I was in charge of, maybe because they knew me, maybe because they thought it sounded fun. But ultimately, it was difficult to be like, "Hey, you need to turn your stuff in on time, I can't just give you a free pass like that." So that was difficult.

And then, of course, being a lead, it's kind of like being an area group lead, except now most of your friends are in this class. Now you have to hound all your friends to be turning in their assignments. When I did it, we had forty planners. Not all of them were my friends, but David and Jose, we all had the similar experience of having to talk with our friends and just be like, "Come on, you've got to turn this in on time. We really need this component in soon. Can you please be on top of it?" Just a lot of wrestling with your friends to get stuff done on time, while also acknowledging they have a lot on their plate. We're all students. We can't all be putting 100 percent into Practical Activism while also being students. So that was just really interesting.

Then when you're a lead, you're also in charge of finding the keynote. And that was pretty challenging because I just didn't feel like I knew a lot of people who could be good for the conference. Even though I'd had two years of experience as a planner,

building up my connections there, I just felt like, oh my gosh, I don't know anyone. It wasn't until the summer between spring and fall quarter that we were able to secure someone. And that was just so incredibly stressful.

Ultimately it was really good and I'm glad I did it for all three years, I guess. I know today, probably right now they're in their first meeting for the fifteenth annual conference. Before I came in here, I actually texted one of the leads and I was like, "Hey, good luck." So yeah, that's an experience. I don't know if you have any questions about that.

Queer and Trans People of Color Conference

Vanderscoff: No, I think that covers that pretty well. But just before we move into our final questions, if there's anything you'd like to say about the Queer and Trans People of Color Conference. I want to be sure that we hit all of these—

Johnston: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: We've gone an hour and fifty minutes.

Johnston: Yeah, the Queer and Trans People of Color Conference, wow. I got roped into that because my friend knew I was part of Practical Activism and I had experience conference planning. So, they asked me to be part of the Queer and Trans People of Color Conference Planning Committee, along with four of our friends. So, six people, total. That was in fall quarter. They just came up to me at—it was during the OPERS Fall Fest. And they were just like, "Hey, do you want to be part of this?" And I was like, "I'm really busy with Practical Activism. Hit me up after that." Then they did. And it's just been nonstop planning. I can't believe this is my second conference of this year,

which is pretty incredible to me. I can't believe I've done two; I've been part of the planning process for two. [somebody comes in to get their stuff]

Yeah, so Queer and Trans People of Color Conference, working with six other people, planning. That is a totally different ballpark of conference—not really thematically—it's just process. With Practical Activism, we had thirteen years of work passed down to us. We had thirteen years of documented work passed down to us to work on and build on top of. Everything was more structured. With the Queer and Trans People of Color Conference, we had absolutely nothing. So, every year the Queer and Trans People of Color Conference gets held at a different university with an entirely different group of students. So, having a paper trail is—it's kind of hard to follow. And we haven't—at least myself, personally—I haven't been in contact with the folks who planned it last year when it was at UC Berkeley. So, we really had nothing to go off of. We've kind of just been like, "Well, this is what happened in the years that *I've* been to it."

And keep in mind, I've never actually attended a Queer and Trans People of Color Conference. It just never worked out in my schedule. So, going into this, I was just like, "I don't know what you all are asking for. I don't know what is expected, how many workshops you have." I didn't even realize it was a three-day conference, as opposed to Practical Activism's one day. So, there were just so many different components to work with. And there were a few points in it where I was just so frustrated I was like, I don't want to be part of this planning committee anymore. But ultimately, I knew it was important to be part of it and I knew it was still something I wanted to work on, still had a passion for. So, I stuck with it and right now I'm in a space where I am surprisingly not stressed by the conference, even though it's coming up in less than—it's the first week of May, so we have about three weeks to work on it. But, you know, at

this point, everything is pretty much finalized. We have our workshops set. We reserved all of the spaces we need. We worked with TAPS for parking.

And a lot of this is thanks to the Cantu [Resource Center] and their support. They stepped in towards the end of last quarter and really, really helped us out a lot. We were really lost throughout winter quarter. It had been really hard to get us together and get us to start doing stuff. So, the Cantu really stepped in and helped us structure this. And I'm forever grateful for the work that they've done. I definitely think this conference wouldn't totally be happening without them because we were pretty lost. But with their help we've really been able to get on top of it and we've really been able to make the best conference that I think we're capable of making. I'm personally really excited for this one. It's definitely, in contrast to Practical Activism where you're working with a whole planning team that's working on every component of the conference, it's just we're working on creating this skeleton and then getting other folks to fill it in. We're not necessarily helping folks develop their workshops; we're asking folks to just pitch an idea and do it, essentially.

Vanderscoff: And are you asking for people to pitch these ideas in terms of UCSC students? What network are you reaching out to then to fill in that skeleton?

Johnston: We're reaching out to all students from UCSC; outside UCSC; I know we have, in particular, reached out to the CSU and UC LGBT centers and asked them for their support with workshops, bringing students, advertising, making sure people know what's happening. So, we're getting help from a lot of the other folks. Workshops aren't just coming from the UCSC students; they're also coming from UCLA, UC Davis, UC San Diego, University of San Francisco, and some non-university-related

affiliations. Some are from community centers. It's been a wide array of different folks coming in.

Vanderscoff: I know we're still a few weeks out ahead of this conference. But if you could just say a little bit about what your goals for this conference are and what would make it a success for you, personally.

Johnston: My goal is just for it to go smoothly. But I think what I want people to get out of it is a sense of community and a sense that you're not helpless. That's really what I want people to gather from this conference. I think if people walk away from the conference knowing that they have a network and a community of folks who are there to support them, that will be the biggest success.

The Election of Donald Trump

Vanderscoff: So coming towards a conclusion here, a final question I have about your time here at UCSC actually brings us into the present moment, pretty much, which is that the political scene has changed significantly over the time of your involvement here at UCSC. You've been very involved in the Oakes community and then in these campuswide activism spaces. And so, I'm wondering if you could share your own story of the recent election and then talk more about what the impact of that has been here in the community.

Johnston: (sighs) For me personally, the election was a shock. The results were not what I expected at all. I'd been so sure that Hillary Clinton would become president. I mean, I did have doubts, but I guess I had this belief that there's not enough hate in the world for Donald Trump to get elected. And just knowing the implications of what his

presidency could mean, especially knowing that his vice president, his choice was Pence, was incredibly alarming. Just knowing—for one, Trump has spoken out against almost every marginalized community imaginable, except for the LGBT community. But implicitly, by choosing Pence, who has been very outspoken against the LGBT community, it was like he took his stance. And for myself, that was really alarming.

I remember, the night of the election, when the results were posted, I remember thinking throughout the night, oh my gosh, well, they still haven't counted California yet. Maybe it will be like when it was with Mitt Romney and Obama, where it really wasn't clear that Obama would win until California's votes were collected. But it became clearer and clearer, the more they went across the map and the closer they got to California, that California's 55 votes just weren't going to do it this time. And as that became clear, I was really distraught. I went to bed that night and it did feel like a dream, in a way, which is weird, because I don't think I ever really had an experience where something has affected me so much where I'm like, oh my gosh, I hope this is a dream and that I wake up.

But I remember waking up. And we were going to watch Clinton's concession speech. And that was just—that was a lot. There were so many emails from the university that day, the following day, just saying, "We're here for you; we're here to support you." And to me, that was so alarming. Because you know, elections in the past, if they don't go your way, okay. But for this one, where we had to create safe spaces for folks who now felt unsafe, it said a lot about the political climate and said a lot about what this presidency means for a lot of folks. I remember that day my co [NA] and I—we went through our building and we door knocked on every door and we just checked in with every single resident we could run into, like just asking them how they felt and letting

them know their resources, letting them know that we're there for them. And a lot of them, being first-years, it was their first election. And a lot of them were just like, "Yeah, this is my first election. It just kind of sucks that it came out like this. And I'm going to go out for the rest of my school, my higher education, with this" A lot of them referenced him as a Cheeto, as our president. I was just like, "Yeah, I'm really sorry," We were just trying to support folks.

I remember other things that happened the day after. I was walking out of the building to go to my work at the Oakes peer advising office. So, I was walking across the Oakes bridge and I saw a friend. And I could tell—everything about that day felt heavy. The campus felt silent. It was eerie. Everyone knew what had happened and no one wanted to say anything. I remember that morning felt like that in particular. I remember seeing this friend walk across the bridge and I could tell she had been crying a lot. I had been crying, too. And we could just tell on each other's faces, like you've had a rough night, I know it. And we didn't say anything, but we saw each other. And we're not incredibly close, which was another thing, too. We're close enough that we say hi to each other and can talk, but it's not like super close. So, like just knowing that when we saw each other, our first instinct was just to hug each other. That was really telling. Like, all we did was we hugged each other. It was silent. I was like, "Stay strong, stay safe." And the fact that I even had to say, "Stay safe" was—it just sucked that I had to say that. And she had to return it to me, saying, "You, too." It made me really upset.

And then, when I went into the office [at Oakes College], I actually don't know her official title, but her name is Marie Morones and she's our front desk office manager. She opens the office for us. And me and her, we don't talk a lot. She tends to leave the peer advisors alone, or just doesn't talk to us a lot. But that day, I was sitting in the peer

advising office and she was walking through doing her thing. And then she stopped before she exited, and she was just like, "Can you believe what happened?" And we had this whole conversation about how messed up it was. For us, it was just like, I can't believe we have to go on. We have to treat today like it's another day and we have to continue working and continue going about our day as if nothing's wrong.

Luckily for me, working at that office and having an on-campus job, the advisors that day were like, "Hey, if you need a day off, you can leave and you can still clock the hours if you want because it's a tough day. We understand that you all are going through a lot. If you don't want to do drop-in today, that's fine. You can just stay back here in the records room and file back, or just kind of chill if you just need that space." So, I was fortunate enough to be able to take a little bit of a break. But at the same time, it was really heavy that day. That's what I remember about the election.

I think later on that day, the CAs had thrown an emergency solidarity time for the Oakes community. So, we just came; we went into the Guzman Room. We had a small mic setup and people were sharing their concerns and their grievances about what had happened. It was really emotionally heavy. A lot of tears were shed in that room. So many of us were so heartbroken, and so in disbelief, and so worried about what would not only happen to us, but what would happen to our family. There was a lot going on. There was a lot of heavy emotion for the next couple of days. But a lot of us were just in a moment; we need a time right now to mourn. And tomorrow we'll march. Tomorrow we'll do our activism and tomorrow we'll do that. But right now, we need our space to mourn and just be together as a community before we can start resisting.

It's been tough politically and it's actually encouraged me to read the news more. So, every day I check up on my news apps and I read them. Because as much as I hate hearing about what's going on, I feel like I need to be informed. I've been just trying to stay as informed as possible, and sharing what I know with other folks, because I think that's really important. But I also—it's tough.

I'm also, in some ways, a little bit inspired by the activism that *has* come out of it. And from what I've been hearing, a lot of Republicans whose seats are up for the 2018 midterms, a lot of them are facing heat in their town halls. A lot of them are getting booed in their town halls. And a lot of them are getting a lot of negative support. So, it's kind of hopeful. Maybe the midterms can really change it around and put the checks and balances back a little bit, so that Trump isn't just doing whatever he wants to do on a whim. Because he is a wild card and it's just really no telling. All the bills that have been in place, all the executive orders—it's a lot to keep up with.

I'm also really concerned with Betsy DeVos and her whole thing. Her whole thing was just incredibly infuriating. Knowing she's defunding public schools, I'm so worried about the generations that are in school now and what's going to happen to them. I'm super concerned about a lot. I mean, DeVos is one of them but there are so many others. It's just so much to focus on. There's not a single person that he picked that I was like, oh, yeah, they're okay. Especially his EPA person was just like—

Vanderscoff: Pruitt?

Johnston: Yeah, that was just a lot. There's just a lot to think about. Part of me is just like, I hope it's only four years. But then the other part of me is like, how are we going to last four years? Everyone says—there are people who say, "You know, we got

through Nixon. We got through Reagan." But the people who got through Nixon and the people who got through Reagan are the people with privilege. And there's a lot at stake right now. So, I don't feel like I can just say, oh, yeah, we just need four years because some people don't have four years.

Vanderscoff: I'm curious then what sort of response you've seen here in the community since then. That could be in terms of the sort of programming that you're doing, that could be in terms of the conversations that you're having. Just as a sort of a final question on the political moment that we're in.

Johnston: I'm seeing a lot of marches. Obviously, the Women's March, which was nationwide. There's been a Women's March, which was pretty incredible to see. I didn't have a chance to participate that day. I had some issues with certain aspects of it, but seeing that sort of mobilization gave me some sense of hope. In general, I've seen a lot of rallies.

And in terms of my own programming, my friend and I did an event—it was a solidarity thing. The focus and the theme of it was talking about your identity and just owning who you are, and in that way, resisting. So, using our identities as forms of resistance, and just existing. But for the most part, for myself, it's just been being there for others and just staying informed.

Vanderscoff: So that brings us into the present moment. In conclusion, when you think about UCSC, do you think that UCSC seemed to change in your time here? What's becoming of UCSC? And this might relate to the political context or whatever, and what do you make of that?

Johnston: I don't know what is and isn't changing. I don't know if it's changing or if I'm noticing it more, but I'm definitely noticing that UCSC isn't as liberal as I thought. It is definitely super liberal. But there's always more for me; you could always be doing more. So maybe I'm noticing more of the less that it's doing, and how it's *not* stepping up for students.

I wouldn't say the students are changing too much. I can't think of ways that I specifically think it's changing for better or for worse. I think it's sticking with its activist history. To some degree, it feels less serious now. Just based on what I've heard of movements in the past that have started at Santa Cruz, it just feels like now a lot of people take the opportunity for these protests to party, take off their shirts and just get like super high and wasted. When I'm talking about that, I'm specifically talking about a couple of years ago when they were doing tuition hikes. People occupied Humanities and a lot of people decided to get naked and drink inside of the Humanities building and absolutely trash it. And for me, that was just sad to see. People were definitely trying to be like, oh, I'm going to be resisting these changes, but kind of made a mockery out of it by—I don't know. It just wasn't serious enough, in my opinion. So, I can see like to some degree, people are not totally living in the legacy that's been left behind, and just sort of going through motions that they think should be happening, but not totally, I don't know, how they should be happening? (sighs) I don't know. I feel like some movements have been less serious than others on this campus. And some of the ones that have been less serious, should have been taken more seriously. That's kind of disappointing to see. I know I'm not the only person who thinks that. I've talked to some of my friends about it and we've just been like, yeah, that was a joke earlier and these things need to be taken more seriously.

Vanderscoff: So when you think about that you've observed here, in terms of this activist legacy and also in terms of the nature of the education you've received here, do you have any thoughts about what the core things might be that you're taking forward, in terms of what you think you might do after you graduate? Which is just about where we're at.

Johnston: Yeah. I mean, for me, just answering that last portion, in being a peer advisor, I talked a little bit about wanting to become a guidance counselor, and training in academic advising. So, after school, I'm planning on pursuing my master's in counseling so that I can become an academic advisor and start advising students. My biggest reason for becoming a neighborhood assistant, is I will be doing it to become visible for students so that they can see themselves in positions in higher education. I think in particular with counseling, it's a very white-dominated field. I also haven't seen a lot of queer people in the field, so I want to bring more of that into it, just by taking up space in these positions, so that other students can see themselves in advising and perhaps be more comfortable going to their advisor, knowing that their advisor shares some of their experience. That's how I see my own activist work continuing, is just continuing my own personal visibility. But also, I don't plan on stopping getting involved. I plan on continuing my involvement in movements, in activism, and continuing to stay aware and trying to know everything that I can do to help other communities and to help my own communities.

Vanderscoff: That's great. Is there anything else you might like to say by way of closing?

Johnston: I don't think so.

Vanderscoff: Well then on my end, I'd just like to thank you so much for your time and your insights and for all the work you're doing here at UCSC.

Johnston: Yeah, thank you for having me.

Vanderscoff: Good. With that, we'll close off that record.

Katherine Le

At the time of her interview, Katherine Le was a sophomore majoring in politics and legal studies. She grew up in San Jose, is the daughter of two Vietnam War refugees, and is active with the Asian American Pacific Islander Resource Center at UCSC. Le is a dedicated member of the College Nine community—her college activities included serving on the College Nine Senate, including a term as vice president of internal affairs; joining the Student Union Assembly (SUA), and helping lead orientation for the college.

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Vanderscoff: Today is Friday, April 14, 2017. And this is Cameron Vanderscoff here for the UCSC Student Interviews Oral History Project. So, what we've been doing to start this off is asking people to introduce themselves, identify themselves in whatever words they choose, and then start us out by saying a little bit about your background.

Early Background

Le: Absolutely. So, it's great to be here today. My name is Katherine Le. I'm a second-year undergraduate student studying politics and legal studies at UC Santa Cruz. And I am born and raised in San Jose, California, an amazing place full of diversity. Lots of competition there and a myriad of amazing folks working in so many different sectors.

I was born to two Vietnam War refugees. They're both immigrants. And they both came over to the United States and really built themselves from the ground up after fleeing the Vietnam War. So, refugee and immigrant background is very strong to how I identify. And especially as an Asian-American Vietnamese woman navigating the space in the university space, I strongly identify with that. And also as a woman of color.

Vanderscoff: Great. So, you've given us a little bit about your family. I'm wondering if you could talk about your personal background leading into your educational background, so I have a bit of a context of what it is you're bringing with you to UCSC.

Le: Right. So, personal background in terms of educational experience that I came from?

Vanderscoff: Yeah, exactly. I'm talking about your family's feelings around education, and starting to put some of those pieces of your context together.

Le: Right. So back in San Jose, I went to public school from kindergarten to twelfth grade. The public schools that I went to in San Jose were vibrant in pushing for education for all students. There was a sense of underlying competition and pressure that I noticed everywhere I went in terms of coursework, in terms of classes, in terms of the kind of community and environment that I lived in. Just imagine an environment where many students have immigrant parents who immigrated over and really pushed their children to strive for the best. That's the kind of neighborhood and environment that I lived in. So, in turn, the academic environment that I was raised in was very pressured to excel. I think that there are good parts of that and bad parts of that, as well, because while students were able to pursue excellence and be pushed to do the best that they could in academics and extracurriculars, things like mental health and things like physical wellbeing were often pushed aside in compensation for doing well in school.

I think that going to public school was a great experience because it really gave me a look into how our California public education system worked, and especially the difference in how

different public schools receive funding. We have often labeled San Jose as this amazing city with a bunch of tech folks pursuing high-paying jobs. But the thing that many people may not realize is that the income disparity in San Jose is massive and that schools in San Jose often receive funding at very, very, very different levels. So, you can start from one street at a public school that receives a lot of funding and has many resources for AP classes, and then drive down five minutes to another school that barely offers any AP classes for their students. Students from these schools live right next to each other and may not receive the same resources.

So, even though my school did have AP classes and tried to support students, our school had very few counselors, and the number of students that came into our school because it was supposedly seen as a good school in the district, ended up overcrowding the school and maybe not dispersing resources as well to students, thereby decreasing or degrading the amount of resources that student were able to access.

I think that transfers over to higher education as well, especially observing how funding is dispersed throughout the UC system. But what I see in higher education now—public, primary and high school education—lower education going to higher education, is I feel like in higher education there's more of a push to say hey, go out and talk to these advisors. And hey, here are the resources that we have here. And they really do try. Whereas in the high school experience that I came from, it was more so—here are the resources—and then they don't talk about it again.

And oftentimes students struggled to find—like there were long lines trying to access counselors, but there was only one counselor. I don't know quite the number, but it was like one counselor for a thousand students (laughs) which really doesn't work out for students who are struggling. So, you know, in summary, building a competitive environment in K-12 education is a good thing, but one thing that I will be certainly critical of is the fact that these students in my

community, and their mental health and physical health, were often pushed aside or ignored because of this push to be the best, or be the greatest, or go to the best colleges.

I lived and grew up in East Side San Jose, which has a huge demographic of students of color, and especially AAPI [Asian American and Pacific Islanders] students as well. So often, I think that AAPI students and their mental health is a topic that's very stigmatized, which is unfortunate. And when you match that with this competitive environment that San Jose pushes—and in general, the Bay Area pushes—for their high school students, for their elementary school students, it creates quite a toxic narrative. These students can't talk about what they're going through, or they can't talk about how they're feeling in regards to their family life, or regards to their extracurricular. And that's something that, coming here to college, I realized was a huge issue that I might have not even seen through, that I went through and didn't realize that hey, this is a really big issue that we should be talking about.

Vanderscoff: And so I'm curious, then, so when it comes to you personally, when you think about high school, how then did you navigate or set priorities for yourself when it came to this strong pressure to succeed, balanced against a setting where there's the disparity of resources that you describe?

Le: Oftentimes, I think that I felt a certain pressure to focus specifically on the goals I had set in front of me, which in turn ended up having a negative effect on checking in on how I was doing and checking in on how I was feeling in terms of this disparity. Sure, it did motivate me to pursue my goals, and do what I needed to do, and be the best that I could. But there were moments where I did feel like hey, I don't know if I can go to a school counselor for support because I don't want to stand in this long line. Or hey, I don't know if I can reach out to someone in this school that may specialize in more intersectional needs for students because of the fact that oftentimes schools just push for the numbers, and schools may just push for standing or excellence in certain areas. And that's not to say that my high school wasn't a great

avenue for students in search of opportunities, because it was. And it was an avenue to allow me to seek leadership positions and cultivate friendships that are long-lasting.

But there are hidden crevices in the system that I noticed many students were suffering through. I think that's why I highlight mental health of high school students so much, especially in Bay Area schools. Because if you look at different Bay Area schools, the negative mental health status of students is skyrocketing. Also, Bay Area schools are often known for students who end up committing suicide because of the stress of school. So, this is the kind of environment that I came from. I think it speaks volumes about the necessity to have resources for K-12 students to talk about these issues and destigmatize the topic of mental health among students, and also cultivating environments that give students access to mentors, counselors, resources. I think that all ties into funding of our public education system in California because without funding, students will not be able to have these resources.

Vanderscoff: And so, this is a conversation that you sensed at the time you were in high school was not happening, nor were there resources on hand that would be of any assistance to you in negotiating these forces that you describe.

Le: Could you repeat your question again?

Vanderscoff: Yeah. So, in other words, you're saying this conversation needs to happen, right?

Le: Yes.

Vanderscoff: So then my question to you is was this conversation happening in any way, I guess, when you were in high school? This could be in terms of the administrative level, but also in terms of you and your fellow students. I mean, is this a realization you've come to more recently? Or is this something you had some consciousness of at the time?

Le: The closest thing I think that I saw as a push towards helping out students was my school put in a hotline for tips, as to what's going on with students and things like that. But there was never any workshop on student wellbeing or student mental health. And what was astonishing with that dichotomy was that I had friends who were struggling with their own issues at home and trying to destigmatize talking about mental health. I could see the struggle in my community. And yes, while we talked about it with each other, it didn't seem to me like we knew about resources that we could go to to talk about these issues, or people to talk to these issues with. So, I guess answering your question, if there were resources by San Jose schools to kind of talk about these things—maybe now there are resources, and increased resources—but the time that I was there, I don't think that there was enough exposure to those resources. I'm sure that there are efforts to work towards destigmatizing it now because it's such a huge topic, in terms of mental health. But back when I went to public school in K- 12, I don't think there was much exposure to that.

Vanderscoff: Thank you for sharing that. I think that that will be a theme that we can then pick up here at Santa Cruz, whether the conversation was different or not. But before we do that, we need to get you to Santa Cruz.

Le: Right. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: So maybe you could say a little bit about how your academic interests, then, took shape in this context that you're describing. And then connect the dots as to how you heard about Santa Cruz and decided to apply.

Le: Absolutely. So currently, I'm studying politics and legal studies. But those aren't the majors that I was accepted into the school for. I actually applied to UC Santa Cruz under the major of business management/economics. I think that this area of social sciences was mostly tailored by my interest in speech and debate and forensics at my high school in San Jose. So, speech and debate and forensics was something that filled four years of my high school experience back in

San Jose. The speech and debate team at my high school started out as a very underdog type of team, a very tightknit group of students. Not many people knew about the club at all. So, my first year, I was essentially competing and kind of learning things on my own. Although there was support here and there, it was a little bit sparse, since our club was still trying to form a solid foundation.

And what really sparked my interest in speech and politics and business and higher leadership was the motivation that I got after I went to a tournament and I actually ended up failing very, very, very hard. I forgot what my speech was about. I was nervously fumbling with my papers and trying to put it in front of me, and asked the judge if I can read off my script. And I think this failure was really the catalyst for me to say hey, this thing happened. How can I improve from it and how can I build myself up and learn from this?

After that speech tournament, where I completely butchered my speech (laughter) and I was fumbling around with my papers, which wasn't even allowed in the competition. You're not allowed to actually read from your paper. You're supposed to memorize a ten-minute speech. It was an original oratory speech, which is a speech you write for yourself on a social topic or issue. And you're supposed to memorize it and speak for the duration of ten minutes. I was asking the judge if I could read off it, because I didn't know what to do and it was my first ever tournament. I felt devastated. I felt so devastated after this tournament.

And even though I felt so bad about it, I was like hey, let's try again. Let's see if I can learn from this, memorize it and practice my delivery. Next thing I know, I went to a Santa Clara University tournament. And I ended up placing first place in original oratory for that tournament.

This foundation of trial and error, learning from failures, and seeking to push forward, is a value that I hold close to my heart from the educational environment that I grew up in—having willpower and determination to say hey, I failed here, but what can I do about it and how can I

move forward from it? So, I think that kind of strive to keep on pushing forward and talk about social issues and talking about political issues is what really cultivated my interest in the social sciences field as a freshman in high school.

And from there, you know, I've built up this forensics— And I mentioned forensics, because I think that was really the catalyst for pushing me towards having the confidence to seek studying business or politics in higher education because they are fields that are primarily dominated by men. And oftentimes there isn't enough representation of women in those spaces, especially in higher leadership spaces. Not only that, but a woman of color in those spaces as well.

Around me, there's many folks being pushed to go into STEM fields. Here I was, wanting to pursue business or politics or legal studies, whereas people were being pushed to study sciences and maths and engineering—very Silicon Valley-based type of studies, right? Because San Jose's the heart of the Silicon Valley.

So, from being an underdog in my freshman year, I was able to become speech captain and lead a group of students who are also interested in speech forensics, help them out at tournaments, and really collaborate and listen to what their interests were, what they wanted to speak about at these tournaments. And by my senior year of high school, I ended up being a California High School Speech Association state champion finalist. So, the contrast of being this little freshman that didn't know what I was doing—and my mom was the only person who went with me to my tournament and supported me when I got that first-place trophy and we drove home together—to performing in front of 500-plus students and teachers and parents and faculty from across California—you know, the top of the top forensics competitors in the state of California—by my senior year, was incredible. It was incredible. I think that really goes to show that being able to work with what I had, even though it might have been small, ended up

paying off, through passion and collaboration with others, and through listening to input from others, and how to build this organization into something greater to support students.

Those are values that really relate back to my family, too because they really had to come here and emigrate here, with basically nothing. Because they were fleeing from war, they had to leave a lot of things behind in Vietnam. I think those values instilled in me determination to just make do with what is in front of me and really work with the people around me to uplift each other and push for a common goal.

Coming to UC Santa Cruz

So, when I came to Santa Cruz, I switched my major from business management/economics to politics and legal studies. When I was applying for colleges for the UC system, I happened to just click on business management/economics, because I guess that was what I was interested in during that time. But I ended up switching it anyway.

The reason why I came to Santa Cruz, actually, was because I ended up getting waitlisted at many of the other UCs. Which is interesting, because there's a state audit that actually came out that said that the UC system actually admitted more out-of-state students, which ended up harming in-state California students.

Vanderscoff: Right, and then in this budgetary atmosphere as well, right?

Le: Right I'm not sure if I was a direct result of that. (laughs) But I ended up getting waitlisted to other schools. So, Santa Cruz accepted me. And I was like okay, I suppose I'll go to Santa Cruz. And financially it made sense as well for me to stay in-state.

Little did I know my experience and journey at Santa Cruz would blossom into so much more. This was a school that I didn't really know much about at all when I applied. It accepted me;

and I was waitlisted at other schools. So, I was like hey, I'll go to Santa Cruz and see what they have to offer.

I had no idea that I would be studying at a school that was so rich in history and activism, a school that was so incredibly involved in interdisciplinary studies. Because the politics and legal studies majors are incredibly multifaceted and there's a reason why the politics major is called "politics" and not "political science," too. There's an entire history behind that as well, in the creation of the major.

So, I think that the motivation, again, in summary, that I gained from forensics in high school and becoming interested in politics and interested in governmental organizations, and public speaking, transferred to my experience in college and encouraged me to study the field of politics and legal studies. And become involved, more involved, in what the school has to offer in terms of advocacy and student government.

Vanderscoff: And so I do have a lot of questions about your academic work here.

Le: Yeah, absolutely.

First Impressions of College Nine

Vanderscoff: But before we get into that, I'm wondering if we can go to the first day, first weeks here. If you could say first how you wound up in College Nine, and then second, talk about your first impressions of College Nine relative to home, relative to San Jose.

Le: So, when I was reading up on the different colleges, I found the ten-college system to be quite fascinating, actually. I imagined it almost as if it was a Hogwarts-style college, where you had your own affiliation, right? And whichever theme or area of educational interest that you enjoyed, you would obviously maybe pick the college for that. Or for other reasons. I really liked the idea of an international, global perspective. Traveling is something that is embedded

in my family, whether it be from their immigrant story traveling over, or to the travels that my family has done together. Being able to seek different perspectives on a global level was something that greatly appealed to me.

Not only that, but College Nine is a college that is very central to campus and accessible in many different ways as well. And College Nine and Ten are colleges that were more recently built. So that also appealed to me.

Also, I really enjoy the fact that the dining hall was open late. They changed that this year, where more dining halls are open late. But College Nine and Ten were extremely appealing because who doesn't want to be able to access the dining hall until very late.

Vanderscoff: (laughter) Yeah, I remember that. So, you show up; you come to College Nine. And then let's talk about your first impressions of College Nine, which could be coming into the dorms, the people you're seeing. Just relating that to the difference from home, if that makes any sense. In other words, the process of you sort of making a new home here, and how that might have been different.

Le: I think that moving away from home for anybody could be an exciting, or a scary, or a nerve-wracking process. And it certainly was for me. Even though I'm from San Jose and I live right over the hill, just an hour away, Santa Cruz is an incredibly different environment and many students coming in feel a range of emotions in regards to entering this new space. Because we are in the mountains, we are a little more isolated away from the city, even though it's a thirty-minute metro bus ride away to downtown. So, for me as a freshman coming into the space, obviously I felt excited to meet new people. But I also felt nervous that maybe I won't make friends the way that I have a solid group of friends back in San Jose. Or, will I be able to make the right connections to get me through college? Where can I fit in? I think that's a very common struggle amongst many first-year students—first-year students are all trying to find their place, and feel like they belong somewhere. That was the main theme of my struggle my

first year: finding a sense of belonging and finding where do I belong? What organizations should I reach out to feel like hey, I feel accepted here? Or hey, I have something to offer to this organization.

Something quite astonishing that I realized throughout the course of my first year here at UC Santa Cruz is that there was a diverse group of students at College Nine, with all different kinds of interests because of the fact that it was an international college, there are international students there; we also have the ILC. So, diversity certainly wasn't lacking there. But one thing that really stood out to me my freshman year; there was one statement that someone said to me that really took me aback. So, I come from a very predominantly Vietnamese community and AAPI community, as I stated earlier. And coming into this College Nine space and having some folks tell me, "Oh my gosh, you're the first ever Vietnamese person I've ever met in my life," was very astonishing and striking and different, as you could imagine.

So, my first year, I was like, oh, that's kind of weird, or that's kind of strange. But this bigger issue of looking at diversity on college campuses wasn't something that I really started unpacking and looking into until my second year here at UCSC—really unpacking the experiences that I went through my first year at UCSC and understanding what kind of resources I can reach out to, does College Nine have to offer in terms of cultivating that diverse perspective.

So that was an example of something that I experienced. I do understand that there are works on the UCSC campus to critically looking at micro aggressions on campus and focusing on the experiences of students of color on this campus as well. And although the UC system pushes for diversity, I think that there's always still more room and work for diversity to be pushed for across all elements—in our educational experiences, in our social experiences—in higher education.

Vanderscoff: So you talk about there being a need for that.

Le: Right.

Students of Color at UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: When you came to this campus and you think about your first couple of months here, being a student of color on this campus, did it seem like those conversations had been happening on the campus? I mean, if they needed to happen more, I'm curious about what your own experience of that was as an incoming student.

Le: Right. So, it was a bit of a culture shock, really, coming to this campus. I was struggling to find a space that I felt like I belonged in. And sometimes I didn't know that hey, there's the Ethnic Resource Center. Or hey, there are identity groups on campus that you can go to. Or hey, there's these advisors that you can reach out to. They were all there. They're all there. And it's just a matter of reaching out and talking to them about these things. But sometimes as a first-year student, I didn't know where I could reach out to, or who I can talk to for that because I didn't know much about the campus at the time. Now it's different, and now I understand that hey, there's these resources. But at the time coming in, I was confused and struggling to make friends with a lot of folks but not really feel a sense of belonging anywhere I went.

Pushes towards supporting diversity at UCSC have been embedded in our history here. Fighting for the Ethnic Resource Center was a thing that happened; even women's studies was something that was fought for on this campus. And that's something that I really admire and appreciate about the culture at UCSC, is that we've always been activists here. We've always been pressuring for students to have exposure and always pressuring for students to have their voices heard. And we have seen changes from this. We have seen changes in terms of creating demands for more access to resources for students of color. And supporting the Ethnic Resource Center. Fighting for the DRC on campus. Fighting for the CRES major, critical race and ethnic studies. These are all things that are built into the robust activist history of UC Santa Cruz. And I think that the fight doesn't stop. It doesn't stop. Which is wonderful. Even coming into college

in the 2015-2016 school year, where UCSC has so many more resources than when it was founded in 1965, work still has to be done. And especially with this new administration in the White House. More now than ever, I think we need to protect our students and make sure that our public higher education system is as inclusive as it can be.

Vanderscoff: So you talk about the history of activism at UCSC—

Le: Right.

Vanderscoff: So I'm curious then, what experiences—be they classroom, be they social—allowed you to start to learn about this history and to tap into this history? Where does this knowledge come from?

Le: Right. I think that it's a pairing of two different avenues that I've become involved in at UCSC. One would be my education in politics and legal studies. In general learning about what UCSC has to offer from a political standpoint and talking to professors and their experience here at UC Santa Cruz, and how they came about here and what they've been involved in, has introduced me to historical and relevant political and legal narratives of this institution.

And then the other one is student government on this campus. I've been involved in the Student Union Assembly for two years now. I'm second year. Reading about the history of the Student Union Assembly, and reading more about and learning more about the kinds of initiatives that the Student Union Assembly has pushed for on this campus—because the Student Union Assembly was something that had to be created, too, as well, twenty years after UCSC was founded, as a means of holding administration accountable for things that students may have found problematic on campus—for example, racism on UCSC campuses, more fees on students, and things like that. So, through student government, I've found and built relationships with student leaders that have been so wonderful and have helped me learn more

about where UCSC started from, in terms of pushing for issues that students are concerned about.

Vanderscoff: Great. And in just a little while we're going to talk about your work with the SUA and all of that. But first, I wanted to talk a little bit about—so you mentioned not initially having a sense of belonging here.

Le: Right.

Vanderscoff: So that's a thread I want to hold onto. I'd like to ask you then, if and how that has changed for you, right? Can you think about particular anecdotes, or classes, or moments, where that changes in any way, if it does?

Le: Yes, absolutely. Just to preface, that has changed. That has changed. So, I think there's two portions of where I found a sense of belonging. There are two different roads to where I found that sense of belonging. The first road would be through the AAPI community. So, during the end of my freshman year, there was an event being held by AAPIRC on campus. And I remember as a freshman kind of sitting in my room and thinking huh, who can I go to this event with? I couldn't really think of anyone to go to this cultural event night with, so I just decided to go on my own.

So, I went out to the College Nine multipurpose room. And it's this great event; there's all this catered food. And it really reminded me of home. It really did. And this is something that I talked to the director of AAPIRC, Nancy Kim, about, about how that was the event where I felt so happy. I felt like hey, there's a community here for me. There are resources here for me, and they're here to make me feel at home, and to encourage me to get involved, and get fed, and get connections within my community. And you know, sitting at this event and watching the cultural performances in the AAPI community, and sitting at the table and talking with other AAPI folks, and just having fun, and having conversations with them, made me feel so

connected, and made me feel such an amazing sense of belonging for one of the first times at UC Santa Cruz. I think that's a really beautiful thing that the Resource Centers are able to offer that kind of environment for students of color on this campus.

And from there, I finally felt like hey, this is a space where I can go to; this is a space where I can seek leadership opportunities, and build relationships with the people in this space. So, in terms of the AAPI community, that's where I found my first one, towards the end of my first year at this event that they were holding.

AAPIRC is such an amazing resource for AAPI students, because they offer tons of programming, leadership opportunities, and I'm constantly and consistently impressed by the kind of work that they do. So that's the first avenue of belonging that I found.

Student Leadership and Activism

The second avenue of belonging that I found was in the Student Union Assembly. So, coming to UC Santa Cruz, there's usually an OPERS festival that happens. That's where students are able to try to find what club or interest they might be wanting to sign up for. I was desperately trying to search for a UCSC forensics team. There was none. There was none. So, I was like, okay, so what is close to a speech and debate team? And I heard about the Student Union Assembly. And I heard about the College Nine Senate.

All the different ten colleges have their own senate, kind of like state governments, and then SUA is like the United States government. So, I joined College Nine Senate, and there happened to be a representative position open for SUA position. I gave a little speech on why I wanted to be the College Nine SUA representative and I ended up getting selected for it in my first year. I ended up going into this space as a freshman, not knowing what to expect, going into this space where a lot of student leaders already had power. I wasn't really sure how to assert myself in such an intimidating space, almost. I remember going to these meetings and just feeling like—I

don't know when to talk, or I don't know what I should say, or do I have a space to say something? Because there were fourth-years in this space that were already so embedded in the SUA and they knew what they were doing, so I wasn't sure where I belonged in that. So gradually I really chipped away at what the SUA was all about, and how I can assert myself in this space and let my voice be heard.

I ended up finding out about internship positions in the SUA officers' spaces. Each SUA officer kind of has their own interns and students are allowed to apply and work for those internships. So, I ended up getting selected to be an outreach and engagement coordinator under the External Affairs Office of the SUA. The External Affairs Office works on local, state, and federal advocacy for student issues. We were working on things ranging from campaigns across the UC system based on mental health services, U Consent, which was a UC Student Association campaign that expired, based on addressing sexual violence and sexual assault on UC campuses. There are campaigns based around diversity and the school-to-prison pipeline. And longstanding campaigns that I'm currently working on now, such as Fund the UC, which is reforming Prop 13 and pushing for awareness of the rising tuition on UC campuses. So, all these kinds of student issues. And I was selected to be an outreach engagement coordinator.

Being in that office and working on campus events really made me feel like hey, I belong in a little family, at least, you know? I think that's what sparked my sense of hey, I have a space within the Student Union Assembly to push for students, and also push for my own voice as well. And get to know students who are also passionate about the same issues.

And so, through those two avenues, I've been able to reach outward and expand outward in terms of my commitment—to one, students of color; and then two, to student activism and political advocacy as well.

I'm also working in the office again this year. I've been working in it for two years now. This year, I'm the chief of staff for the External Affairs Office. I'm also a legislative assistant for our

UCSC lobby core team. We do lobbying on local level, but we've also lobbied in Washington, D.C. as well, for a federal lobbying trip lobbying for supporting federal Pell grants; lobbying for addressing sexual violence on UC campuses. We lobbied for a myriad of things, most of which disproportionately affect low-income students and students of color, which, I think, is so imperative to push for, for our students in the UC system.

There are so many different avenues. What I realize at UC Santa Cruz is that there are so many different avenues of leadership. So, you can go the legislative route, where you meet with representatives and lobby bills and research bills. You can go the activist and organizing route. When elections, presidential elections came around, UCSC students were up and out and ready to protest. And there have been a lot of protests along with that. That was the first time I ever took place in a protest as well. I actually took photos for the protest. I'm interested in media and photography and creating videos. So, I was able to take photos for the protest after the presidential election. And being able to experience the legislative side, being able to experience that organizing side and that protest movement side was very valuable.

Then also there's a third sector—an educational side and programming side—going to educational events where faculty are speaking, or attending social justice workshops and things like that has made me realize that the levels of leadership and the levels of involvement in UCSC are so diverse, which I've really come to appreciate being in student government and being more exposed and involved with ethnic and identity orgs on campus.

Vanderscoff: I'd love to hear some more about some of those levels of leadership. So, if we could go a little bit further—if you could walk us through those different roles that you've described having in the SUA. So, first of all, with the outreach, what sort of outreach you engaged in doing.

Le: So, outreach, my first-year kind of was composed of class raps, letting students know about what conferences were going on, because in the External Affairs Office we work closely with the

UC Student Association, which has conferences and campaigns. So, class raps and flyering in regards to what events that we have going on from our office. This year, in particular, we really focused on lobby corps. We have a brand-new organizing steering committee that we've created, to allow students to come who are more interested in creating demands and supporting resolutions that the SUA may pass, and wanting to be more involved in what marches are going on, or strikes, or protests. So, we have that avenue as well.

And then we have outreach for the legislative side, for our lobby corps team as well. And we're working on multiple campaigns in that lobby corps team, in the lobby corps group. So, outreach composed of that; outreach composed of social media, which we really revamped this year—class raps and fliering, and just building personal relationships and speaking to folks from different organizations.

Vanderscoff: And so how has social media changed this year, then?

Le: Social media has changed in terms of letting students know what the External Affairs Office has been doing in regards to our lobbying efforts, in regards to the events that lobby corps has been running. For example, we had a DIY stress kit event run by our lobby corps "How Are You?" campaign team. So, the UC Student Association has a hashtag #howareyou campaign focused on improving mental health services on UC campuses, especially with CAPS, and pushing for that. So, we held a little event in front of McHenry, actually, where we allowed students to come by and make their own little stress kits. We had candy and food and it was such an engaging and fun event during midterm season, where students were able to pick up a free DIY stress kit and make their own.

Vanderscoff: Well that's interesting that you bring that up. Because in a way that also goes full circle back to what you were talking about at the beginning of our interview—

Le: Right.

Vanderscoff: —the sense that when you were in high school, there weren't really resources and there wasn't really a conversation happening around issues of mental health and support for whatever sort of stress students might be going through.

Le: Right. Yeah, and I think that student movements to push for that on UC campuses are especially important because a lot of student voices go unnoticed. A lot of student struggles go unnoticed. I think that standing up for that is incredibly important, and letting students know that hey, we're here for you and hey, we're students, too, and we would love to support each other and be a resource for each other through this common struggle of going through college together and navigating the space.

Vanderscoff: Mm hmm, I think we'll probably pick that thread up again later. So then, continuing through your involvement with the SUA, you said more recently you've been chief of staff in External Affairs.

Le: Right.

Vanderscoff: So if you could say a little bit about what those responsibilities are, please.

Le: Right. So being chief of staff entails kind of being the right-hand woman to the external vice president. And also checking in with the staff on how they're doing, and managing logistical works within the office as well is something that I've done. And being a source of help wherever each of the staff's roles need help. So almost kind of like the glue, checking in on how everybody's doing. I think that's how I like to see my role, yeah. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: I'm curious about, then, the learning curve on a position like that. So, you mentioned, you said that in high school your background was in oratory, in giving these addresses. So, I'm curious, then at UCSC, what sort of resources there have been for you, or what your own process has been in terms of managing that learning curve into this more communications space, and then also this more political, legislative, lobbying space.

Le: Right, right.

Vanderscoff: I mean, there's a learning curve in speaking a certain way, and communicating a certain way. And I'm curious if you could say a little bit about what your learning process has been in that regard here at UCSC. That could be linked to events, or to classes, or to mistakes, or to successes—whatever that looks like for you.

Le: So, I think that in high school forensics, it was very structured in terms of speaking styles, because there are different events within forensics where students have to speak a certain way, or have to talk about a certain thing in a certain way. Whereas coming to UCSC, there was no forensics team. Speech-wise, it was based on building relationships and how to speak to build those certain relationships.

So, I think that this more communications learning curve was bolstered by really being encouraged to speak to faculty, speak to professors, speak to TAs, speak to my peers on what they're going through. But not only to speak to them, but to also listen to them as well. I think coming to college, everybody was in a similar boat, where we were all coming from different places and all had narratives and stories to tell. What I learned in college is that it is so essential to *listen*, so essential to listen to people and what they have to say. And just through listening to the stories of my peers and the struggles that they were going through, or listening to the amazing experiences that UCSC professors have gone through to get to where they are today, or something as simple as talking to a stranger in the dining hall and then leaving as friends, has allowed me to realize what a friendly place UCSC can be if students are willing to listen to each other, and willing to have patience in understanding that we all come from different backgrounds, and we all come from different experiences and narratives, and we all come from different struggles. But we all have the common thread in us that we all have stories that we hold deeply with us. That's something that has really helped me through improving on how I communicate with others, and improving on working on how I can better my listening skills,

and better my critical thinking skills, in terms of processing what others say, and processing even what's being said by professors in academic spaces as well. So, the medium of building relationships—in its core—has helped me cultivate the kinds of friendships that I have made at UC Santa Cruz in student government and beyond.

Vanderscoff: Sourcing some of these connections between your community engagement and your social life, but before we continue talking more about your life in the college and then also talking about your major, which I want to be sure to get to, I wondered if you would talk a little bit more—well first of all, if there's anything else about the chief of staff. But then getting into the lobbying corps. I'm wondering if you could give me a sense of what your responsibilities are, and then how you fit into that team.

Le: Right. So, for lobby core, I am in a legislative assistant position. And I am the lead for the Fund the UC campaign. Like I mentioned earlier, the Fund the UC campaign is a longstanding campaign under the UC Student Association that focuses on reform for Prop 13 and focuses on the cost of rising tuition on UC campuses. I recently held and organized an event called Tuition Talks here at UCSC, where I invited previous Mayor Mike Rotkin out, I invited UCSA President Ralph Washington, Jr. out, and I invited Interim Vice Provost of Student Success Jay Padgett out to talk about the issues from a student, administrative, and faculty perspective. So that's an example of an event that I have run under this campaign, being in lobby corps. So, we do things like that, like programming with lobby corps. And then we physically lobby representatives as well.

During spring break, I actually just came back from being a delegation leader for the Student Lobby Conference. Which is held in Sacramento, capital of California. So, we brought a delegation of approximately twenty-four students to the Student Lobby Conference from UCSC. They applied for it. It was a free trip for UCSC students to go and take place in this conference, where they learned how to lobby representatives on bills that affected UC students

during that weekend. And by the Monday—Monday was reserved for a day to meet with the representatives at the Capitol, which was such an engaging experience, because many of the students had never lobbied or met representatives before. So, we met local representatives that represent UC Santa Cruz in our district.

And one thing that was a success from this was that SB54, which is a bill that revolves around the status of sanctuary campuses across California, was actually passed through the Senate recently. And we got representatives to co-sponsor bills as well, through student activism and through lobbying for bills.

Vanderscoff: Tell me about the conversations that happened among the UCSC delegation and your own voice about what you wanted to prioritize for your own lobbying—I mean, there's a world of issues that you can focus on—and then how are the particular issues selected?

Le: So are you talking about how the bill, like what bills students are lobbying for?

Vanderscoff: Yeah. So, if you show up and you're going to bat and lobbying for, let's say, Pell grants or something like that, I mean, what conversations have happened prior to that so that you're lobbying for Pell grants and not for a completely different issue. Right? I'm curious about the prioritizing.

Le: So in terms of priority for bills, when it comes to these conferences, the bills are prioritized under the government relations portion of the UC Student Association looking at bills and representatives that specifically support student issues. Then those bills are prioritized according to their parameters and guidelines—feasibility and dire need for students. So that's kind of a general consensus and look into how these bills are pushed forward for the conferences for students to lobby for.

Vanderscoff: So they're almost brought in, then, at a systemwide level. Were there particular things that you all at UCSC were pushing for? Or is the notion more that there's a solidarity as far as what you're pushing for between the various UCs or other student lobby groups.

Le: I think it's a combination of both, really. I think it's a combination of both. Especially in conjunction with the ICE raids that recently happened in Santa Cruz[10], I think that the bills regarding the state of undocumented students were especially important for us to be discussing at this student lobbying conference because of the fact that it hits home so deeply. I think that is a prime example.

And Santa Cruz is a city with an extremely high cost of living and housing and food insecurity is something that affects many UC students across the system. And I think for student movements to be able to fight for this, not only on an activist level, but also on a legislative level, is very important. Financial aid and things like the federal Pell grant directly relate to that. Because the federal Pell grants are something that students don't have to pay back. So, relating it back to that issue that students may go through at Santa Cruz is important when we're lobbying for these bills because it's all directly intertwined. Students who receive financial aid will need that money toward supporting their education here.

Vanderscoff: So those are some of the things that you prioritized, then, when you were in Sacramento. You also mentioned to me in some of our email correspondence that you've actually just recently come back from Washington, D.C.

Le: Right.

Vanderscoff: So I'd love to hear a little bit more about how that trip came about, and then tell us the story of how that then played out.

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[10] See http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-santa-cruz-ice-raid-20170223-story.html for more on the controversial gang sweep/ICE raids that happened in Santa Cruz in February 2017.

Le: Absolutely. In the External Affairs Office, we push for local, state, and federal advocacy. And rarely do we ever hit that federal level. So, this is actually the first time that UCSC students have been able to go out to Washington, D.C. on a federal lobbying trip and the experience was absolutely phenomenal, incredible. Although it was tiring, the work that the team has put in has been amazing. Just amazing.

It was my first time ever going to Washington, D.C. The experience of walking in those congressional buildings, and meeting with those representatives, and feeling that excited but nervous feeling in my stomach before I went into the offices of these representatives—who were just people, too, you know, fighting for a cause—made me feel like I had agency. It made me feel like hey, I do have a space to stand up for UCSC students and through student government, I am able to not only propel the voices of other students, but also propel my own voice as well. I was so lucky to have this opportunity to be able to go into Washington, D.C. and lobby for various bills. I was even able to meet my own personal district representative, Zoe Lofgren, in the 19th District, which was amazing.

Washington, D.C—demographic-wise, there are more black folks than white folks in Washington, DC. They're in the 40 percent ranges. And Washington D.C. is, I believe, 3 or 4 percent Asian, and then like .3, .4 percent Mexican and Latinx folks. So, something quite astonishing that I saw when I came to Washington D.C. was that there was very little representation in these congressional buildings. I was the only AAPI woman in the building. And I wasn't even working there. I was just a student who was visiting.

Vanderscoff: So you mean as far as like congressional staff.

Le: Just congressional staff, anybody working in the buildings. And it was astonishing because these are people that are representing constituents but there was an extreme lack of diversity—extreme lack of diversity. And what was really jarring was that many of the folks behind the food and service counters were people of color. And everybody outside of those food counters

were not. I remember sitting there and being like, wow, I'm one of the only people of color in this room right now. And that's also really reflective of our governmental system and its lack of diversity in terms of representing constituents and representing America as a whole. I think that's something that we should continue to work on.

And you know what? Seeing that made me feel even more empowered to be there. It made me feel even more empowered to be there and to be a student of color representing UCSC, and standing up for students' issues. So that was an observation [about] Washington, D.C. that really surprised me and took me aback. Seeing it in person was even more riveting. And I think that motivates me even more to create relationships back at UCSC to improve diversity and push for intersectional change on campus here and listen to other stories.

Vanderscoff: Because, of course, what you're describing here is seeing these issues play out at the local level, the state level, and then the federal level and realizing they're really systematic. So, you may have already answered this by talking about what you were lobbying for in Sacramento. But I'd like to ask, what were the core subjects that you were lobbying on? And then who were you targeting to lobby in particular?

Le: Right. So, I personally went into meetings with—one representative was Zoe Lofgren. And at the student lobbying conference it was Evan Low and Representative Caballero. And we also met with Anna Eshoo. So those were a couple that I personally met with. The team met with more representatives as well. So, the hot topics were undocumented students, federal Pell grants, and sexual violence and sexual assault on UC campuses. Those are the main ones that I can list off the top of my head.

And the great thing is, is that many of Santa Cruz' representatives were in support of these concepts. Obviously, bills and the language of the bills changes. But for the most part, they were for supporting students, which I find is amazing, because in Santa Cruz County, one of the most

progressive counties in the nation, we have representatives that do reflect what students would like and student issues that are important to push for.

Vanderscoff: So you felt these are issues that had some sort of representation of the constituency of UCSC and Santa Cruz.

Le: Right.

Vanderscoff: So, your process then is so you're granted meetings with these various representatives. And so you go in and essentially make a presentation; you make a pitch? I mean, walk us through that a little bit. And then speaking about which issues seem to be resonating the most—were you getting a better ear on certain things? I mean, if you measure what seemed to be working for the UCSC lobbying corps on this particular trip, what was sticking?

Le: Right. So, in terms of the meetings themselves, we typically have asks for the representatives in terms of whether or not they support the concepts of the bill, whether they support the language of the bill, and if they're willing to co-sponsor it. So, we present facts and figures in regards to UCSC; we present facts and figures in regards to the UC system as a whole. We give statistics and we also give testimonials as well, student testimonials, on how students are actually being impacted by the bills that we are pushing for—whether that means testimonials from undocumented students from UC Santa Cruz, or testimonials from students who personally receive federal Pell grants—these are things that we present to the people that we are lobbying. I think that a lot of people may view lobbying as a very straightforward, here's my pitch type of thing. But I think that the kind of culture that has been cultivated in UCSC lobbying corps is that it's a story that we're telling. It's a student perspective that we're telling to our representatives because when representatives go and talk to other representatives about these issues, they may not recall the specific numbers about how students are being affected. But maybe they'll remember a story that you told them. I think that's an amazing part of

lobbying that many people may not realize, that it's a very story-based thing too, as well. Letting our representatives know about the struggles that students go through is maybe the one thing that a representative may take back and influence a bill.

Vanderscoff: That's great.

Le: Right. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: No, it's very interesting that you're engaging with our mechanisms of government in this way. So, we've gone about eighty minutes. So just keeping track of our time, I thought, unless there's anything further you'd like to say about your work with the SUA or with lobbying that you think we've missed?

Le: I can say things like outside of that, that are kind of related to diversity measures.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, that might be interesting. My next question will be tying us back into College Nine. But if there's something you'd like to say before we go back to College Nine—?

Le: Well, I think that all these experiences that I've had—I've also been an orientation leader for UCSC, too, which I think has really been important to my experience here, building school spirit and giving back to the school, in a way. Because going to orientation was a way where I felt included and I wanted to give back to the community that brought me into this space. So that's another experience that was really integral to my transition to UCSC.

I think that all these experiences that I've had within student government here at UCSC have allowed for me to seek opportunities outside of UCSC. For example, this summer, I'm going to be participating in a future leaders program at Stanford under the Graduate School of Business, which I'm extremely excited for, because it's under Stanford's Diversity sector. It's to encourage more diverse management education and leadership. And I think that with the help of the relationships that I have been involved in, and created at UCSC, and through collaborating with

student leaders and faculty and staff at UCSC—it's really granted me the experiences to be able to even be accepted into and pursue opportunities like this program, which I'm incredibly excited about.

Vanderscoff: That's great. That sounds really exciting.

Le: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: So just to loop back to College Nine for a second, so then you started off on this whole SUA path, representing College Nine with the SUA. So, all these things that you've been working on, are these things that you then communicate back to the College Nine Senate?

Le: Yes, absolutely. So being a SUA representative means that we go to weekly SUA meetings and then we report back to our senates on what happened at these meetings. And then the senate as a whole knows about it.

Vanderscoff: Great. So, before we move towards more concluding questions, I wanted to be sure to ask you about your studies. We haven't talked about them very much yet. You mentioned that you came in to do business management/economics, but that you've taken a different path.

Le: Right.

Politics and Legal Studies Major

Vanderscoff: So I'm wondering if you could outline how that's happened, if there have been certain classes, or assignments, or moments that led to you being on the path that you're on now.

Le: So, I really like the fact that the politics and legal studies department is very writing and essay-focused. Writing is something that I really enjoy doing. I think that being able to critically

think about certain political and legal topics, and learn how to write things like memorandums and things like that appeals to me a lot. That's one of the academic elements of why I took the route toward politics and legal studies.

And just the topics in general being discussed in the politics and legal studies department, and how multifaceted the topics are, really appealed to me as well. And both departments are excellent on the UCSC campus. The professors and faculty are very willing and open to discuss the coursework with the students, which I enjoy very much.

Vanderscoff: And then are there any particular classes or assignments that were a defining moment or a watershed moment for you in saying, okay, this is what I want to do; this is pushing me in the direction that I want to go in here at UCSC? The answer could be no. (laughs)

Le: I don't think there was a particular watershed moment. I think it was more of a gradual thing. In fields such as politics and legal studies, where essay writing is a huge element, I think that it's a process of learning how to work within how UCSC essay writing is structured and how citations are looked through in the politics and legal studies department. I think it really was a process, rather than a watershed moment for me because of the fact that I had to learn gradually how to become a better writer and seek out resources which were there for me to learn how to build my writing skills.

Vanderscoff: Resources such as?

Le: Resources—whether it be major advising or reaching out to faculty and professors. And also going to office hours for TAs was incredibly helpful, too, to learn hey, what are some topics I should be writing on, or how should I structure an essay? The resources are there for UCSC students; it's just a matter of reaching out. So, I think that, again, creating relationships and cultivating relationships with UCSC constituents is so important. And without cultivating

relationships, then it would be more difficult to find those resources and know that hey, people are here for you to help you out.

The Town and County of Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: And one other related topic, speaking of relationships, is local relationships. So, you've talked a lot about some of the work that you've done here on campus, and then on the statewide level and at the federal level. I am curious then about your dynamics or interactions with the town, with the county of Santa Cruz. And that could be either as a student, going down there to be in community spaces, or even just to socialize, or to go to the beach. Or this could be in terms of, maybe more of your lobbying or SUA functions in terms of interactions with the local government. An interest of this project is what students' dynamics are with the city of Santa Cruz and the county of Santa Cruz. So, anything you might like to say in that regard.

Le: So, something that really impacted my time during my first year with Santa Cruz and Santa Cruz County in general was an alternative spring break trip that was offered through College Nine. It allowed students from College Nine and Ten, and students beyond who were interested, to spend spring break on the UCSC campus. And during the day we would go to Watsonville to volunteer at Second Harvest Food Bank, to work with Digital Nest, a program that helps students in the area access technology resources. We were able to engage with migrant and farmworker and undocumented families. Santa Cruz County is very multifaceted and stepping out of Santa Cruz is also important, too, to realize that hey, there's a network and community that expands beyond just us.

And being able to have a little potluck in a farmworker's house in Watsonville with other UCSC students and listen to her story as an undocumented farmworker, and get involved with the community of Watsonville and hold a clothing drive for migrant and farmworker families in this community really showed that UCSC does have resources that allow students to become

connected to the community. [The campus] does have a heart when it comes to reaching out to underserved populations that extend beyond just us and beyond just our community here. And I think that experience in relation to College Nine was extremely valuable.

The UCSC Campus

Vanderscoff: That's great. Another question we've been asking is, getting us back to the campus, is your thoughts about the campus itself. I mean, the UCSC campus is a very distinct place. You're from just over the hill. But as you pointed out, the two sides of the hill are very different—

Le: Right.

Vanderscoff: —really in a lot of different ways. So just wondering what your thoughts are about learning on this particular campus, what sort of impact that has for you. And then living there. Because you still live on campus?

Le: I do, I do. So, I came from a very suburban area of San Jose. Just streets and buildings everywhere. For me and my friends back in San Jose, going to the beach was like a big trip or a big deal. Going into the forest was like, going camping. As you could imagine, it was a very different experience for me to come from a suburban place into a forest-type of environment. It's funny, because me and my friends joke that it's almost like a UC summer camp. (laughter)

And so, that was something that I really had to grapple with coming here, in terms of not only the environmental change, but also the types of people who are here. Because in San Jose, people are very on-the-go, ready to go to their next thing and event, whereas in Santa Cruz, people are much more willing to slow down for a little bit and really take their time on what they're doing. This is a beautiful beach town right by the forest, and that culture has been here for such a long time, right? As opposed to the hustle and bustle of San Jose. So, it was so different coming here, really.

But I really learned to love the environment here at Santa Cruz—the tranquility of the forest, the accessibility of going hiking if I wanted to. Overlooking the Monterey Bay and looking out onto the beach—that's something that I never got to experience in San Jose. And being able to access the downtown area if I wanted to, to take a break from the forest. And able to have a peaceful and calm environment, with its own little quirks, is such a valuable thing, really. I've grown to love this unique town of Santa Cruz and the unique campus of UC Santa Cruz because it's really unlike any other. I think that's why so many people are interested and amazed and awed by the UCSC campus because of the fact that we're surrounded by state parks and we're surrounded by nature. We're right by an ocean with its own vibrant community. And I have grown to appreciate the town so much for what it is.

National Politics

Vanderscoff: One question that I'd like to ask you is a bit about some of the change that you've seen on this campus over the time that you've been here. I ask this with particular interest, given all of the work that you do around politics. I was reflecting that when I was here, in my second year, it was Obama's election.

Le: I see.

Vanderscoff: It was Obama 1. And then, of course, in your second year here, there's been the election of Donald Trump. And so I'm curious then, particularly from your perspective as someone who's engaged with politics on campus and then more widely, your thoughts about the election, the impact of that, and then relating that to your own study and work.

Le: Clearly the election has had a huge impact on the UCSC campus. Right after the election results were announced, students gathered in the Quarry and protested. I think that the election results have caused a lot of unrest in the UCSC community, especially within the marginalized communities of UCSC: students of color, LGBTQ plus students. I think that, now more than

ever, we need to stay in solidarity with one another. I certainly felt the unrest of UCSC when this happened. A lot of students were afraid and may have not known what to do during this time, but this election was a catalyst for students to mobilize and for students to really show that UCSC's activism roots never disappeared. It's always been here. And that when there's a way for students to speak up and get involved in whatever way they can to uplift one another and to protect marginalized communities, students will speak up and do something about it. Which has been incredibly inspiring, I think. Especially coming from my angle of being a politics and legal studies major and also being involved in student government—I have seen this throughout the past two years. And the stark tension that has happened with this election, especially this year.

I think that in whatever capacity that students would like to get involved, in whatever form of activism or pushing for their ideology—there is a space here in Santa Cruz for them to do so. But that means having resources to uplift those voices as well. There may be some students who have more resources than others to uplift their voices, and then other communities who may not feel comfortable or be able to stand up. I think it's important that we recognize that as well.

Vanderscoff: And so then for you personally, I'm curious how the election has impacted your sense of what your priorities are, and then what conversations you'd like to be a part of. We could maybe focus that on SUA in particular.

Le: I think that in terms of conversations and actions that need to take place, at the forefront of that is building coalition with one another across campus and uniting with one another in order to push for demands, or push for exposure towards systematic change. Many students are aware of the systematic and institutional issues that may disenfranchise and marginalize communities, but other students may not be as aware about it, or may not be interested in it. But I think that with this election, I think the tension has risen in Santa Cruz. I think that many students who may not have even been interested in politics have suddenly been more involved

because it may affect them personally, or the effects of the administration are close to what they identify as.

Okay, I can give an example of something that I have been starting to work on. So, there's never been a UCSC women's coalition on campus. That's something that I'm working with a group of women to start. It's quite grassroots right now but I hope to launch it by next year. And something that's really awesome about that is that the UCSC women's movement has been around for a really long time pushing for, like I mentioned earlier in this interview, women's studies on campus, and classes revolving around women. Recently, I took a class called *Women and the Law*, taught by Professor [Gina] Dent, which was really awesome. So, I think that creating this coalition would be really useful to expand gender equality on campus and provide resources. We have the UCSC Women's Center. I also think that a coalition would add to protecting and promoting resources for women on the UCSC campus. So that's an example of something that's been pushed for, especially in response to the rising tensions that the election has created.

Vanderscoff: And so, when you say it's grassroots, you mean it's non-SUA or something like that? Or what does grassroots mean to you in this context, and then, who's at the table? Who are you putting this together with?

Le: Right. In terms of grassroots, I refer more to the fact that it's still in the process of being built up by constituents from the SUA and by representatives from the ethnic orgs. So ideally, what we plan to do is pool different representatives from different ethnic and identity orgs on campus first, to build a cohesive core and then hopefully launch that next year and open it to the public.

Before this coalition can be built, that starts first with building the community and building mission statements and values before opening it to the public, and having a cohesive and

inclusive front that gets perspectives from different identity orgs and different ethnic orgs first. And having a solid group of women to push that forward.

Vanderscoff: What do you see the primary nature of the group being? I mean, insofar as, is this something that you'd see that's like movement-based, or that's protest-based? Or it's going to be programming-based? Or more of a community space? I mean, what do you see as the great function of this?

Le: So, this is something that we're currently in talks about, since this coalition is still being built right now. But something that I envision for this space is not a space that is linear. So, all of the things that you mentioned will be included, or hopefully will be included in this space. So, a space for folks to come together and participate in different sectors of leadership styles. For example, we could have an organizing sector, which can organize around women's-based marches, strikes and protests. We could have a legislative sector that focuses on pushing for women's health bills and sexual assault and sexual violence on UC campus bills, and bills regarding women. And then we could have an educational and programming sector of the coalition that focuses on faculty and student relationships. And talks revolving around women faculty and women staff. And student-to-student dialog and educational platforms. So, I would imagine it to be an inclusive environment that appeals to all different types of leadership styles, whether a woman is down to protest—we have that for that woman. And then whether a woman is more interested in educational and programming things, we would have that as well. So, I would imagine this coalition to be something that is open to different types of tactics in pushing for women's rights and pushing for support for women, rather than any linear front.

Vanderscoff: And is this something that—if you think about our very recent history here—that draws any sort of inspiration from the Women's March, which was just a couple of months ago now?

Le: Right. Something that's very inspirational about the Women's March is that an alumni from UCSC, Carmen Perez, was one of the women in the forefront of the Women's March, which is incredible, really. And the countless activist movements that have been pushed at UC Santa Cruz in regards to educational platforms for women here, educational health resources for women here, have been here for such a long time. I think now, more than ever, it's time to build a coalition to address the issues that UCSC women may face. Not only that, but also tackle the issues on a deeper level for marginalized women, women of color, LGBTQ women, LGBTQ+ women, and provide a space for discussion and open dialog.

Vanderscoff: That's great. And so, one final question—since I've seen it in writing, I know that you have made the intentional decision of rending as women spelled with an "x," instead of a "y" or instead of an "e."

Le: Yes.

Vanderscoff: And so I think it could be really useful for this historical record we're making right now, just to go on the record as to what the intentionality behind that rendering is.

Le: Right. I was really inspired by recently attending the Empowering Womxn of Color Conference. For decades, the Empowering Women of Color Conference at UC Berkeley had been spelled with the "e" instead of the "x." And this year recently they changed it to the "x." And that's what's really inspired me to change the Womxn's Coalition for UCSC to the "x" instead of the "e," in solidarity with the trans community, and to promote a more inclusive definition of what it means to be a woman as well.

Vanderscoff: Great. Thank you for sharing that.

So, we're on our very final questions here. So, one question is: what are your hopes for your own impact here at UCSC? This could be in terms of your own study, or this could be in terms of your SUA work. You've introduced some overarching themes here, going back to your time

in high school, the importance of having some sort of a resource, particularly when it comes to issues of mental health. And then we've outlined a variety of other issues that students face, intersectional issues. So, I'm curious then, if in light of all those themes that you've introduced at different times, you can say just a little bit about what you hope your impact might be.

Le: Right. So currently, obviously, the Womxn's Coalition is something that I'm looking to push for. And potentially pursuing more opportunities within the SUA, in particular, officer positions.[11] I think that the sector of improving diversity and inclusion on campus is extremely close in my heart and important. It's something that I look forward to pushing for more.

In terms of the legislative work that I've done, in collaboration with that, I would also love to work closely and continue working with that as well. And work with the AAPI folks on the UCSC campus, I also look to continue pursuing. And taking these experiences with me post-UCSC, I know will be vital to me in pursing whatever happens post-graduation.

Vanderscoff: And so, you've spoken a lot about the importance of measures that would increase, your phrase has been "to increase diversity" in a meaningful way here at UCSC.

Le: Right.

Vanderscoff: And so, I'd like you to relate this to your own experience of coming here and adjusting here, locating yourself here. So if you could just say something about where the resources seem to be good, where they're there, and then, when are the resources not there. In other words, what do we have now and then what are the next steps?

Le: Next steps, right. So, the reason why I appreciate the movements to push for the ethnic resource centers and identity orgs and ethnic orgs on campus is because without these resources, students like me wouldn't feel a sense of belonging here, wouldn't have at least an

[11] Elected as Student Union Assembly Vice President of Diversity & Inclusion in Spring 2017.

access to feel a sense of belonging here. Those resources and those centers are amazing for students to come and feel like they have a sense of home, almost. I think that, while there are still efforts towards increasing diversity and retention on campus, like Engaging Education—that's a student outreach and retention services—I think that funding for these resources and funding for these centers is extremely important and vital in order to preserve these resources on our campus. Moving forward, I think that more conversations and more actions—whether it be through lobbying, whether it be through protests, whether it be through educational programming—could take place to support marginalized communities on this campus.

So, I suppose answering the question of what steps can we take moving forward—those actions that I mentioned previously I think do need to be uplifted and sustained in order to be able to address the root of institutional marginalization that happens to students.

And I hope that moving forward, students will still be able to have this chance to speak up and have the chance to really work with one another, and even get support from faculty to be able to speak up for themselves and to continue to fight.

Final Reflections

Vanderscoff: Great. You're in your second year, so you have some time yet, but just looking forward, some thoughts about what might be next for you. And that could be here at UCSC, or thinking beyond UCSC.

Le: Right. So here at UCSC, I am again looking forward to working more with the AAPI community, and also looking more into what positions may be open for the SUA, in terms of officer positions and beyond that, carrying this work forward. Potentially going to grad school as well. As I mentioned earlier, I'm going to be in a program at Stanford. So maybe through that program I'll be able to look at what kind of opportunities may be around the Bay Area for me one day. And with this politics and legal studies focus, political leadership or business

leadership is something that I see myself in in the future. I think it's important that women of color are at the table, and do have a seat at the table because cutting down the stereotypes and cutting down the discrimination that women of color face in leadership positions and in executive spaces is incredibly important. That starts with encouraging women of color to pursue leadership positions in college, in high school, in elementary school—wherever it may be—in order to transcend to a bigger level in the workforce one day.

Vanderscoff: Wonderful. So that's all I have on my end. Is there anything else you'd like to say in closing?

Le: Thank you for offering me the opportunity to be able to participate in this project. I think it's wonderful that students are able to have an avenue to talk about their time at UCSC. I really do appreciate the fact that this campus and this school has even given me the opportunity to speak about these things and to feel like I do have a voice in a community that is so widespread and large. And to be able to have an opportunity to build a community here and to make long-lasting friendships here—that is absolutely invaluable to me. I'm so amazed and thankful every day for the chance to be able to even have the privilege to be able to attend an institution like this. So, thank you so much. I really do appreciate your time.

Vanderscoff: I just want to close on my end by thanking you for yours and for all the work that you're doing here on campus.

Le: Absolutely.

Vanderscoff: Thank you.

Le: Thank you.

(Recorder is turned off, and then back on several minutes later for a postscript)

Vanderscoff: We're picking up with a little coda here, because we were talking after we turned off the recorder, which is always a dangerous thing. We were just talking about another intersection that you were observing between your own family history and UCSC history. So, if you could just talk about that.

Le: Absolutely. So, a majority of my family are Vietnam War refugees and immigrants. And what I find particularly interesting is that during this time, there were many anti-Vietnam War protests and movements on the UCSC campus. So many students were involved in this. And I think that the intersection between that and the fact that my family was in the process of fleeing the Vietnam War during this time was incredibly interesting.

My grandfather actually worked in the Vietnam War in South Vietnam during this time. He studied law in Vietnam. And during the fall of Saigon in 1975, was when my mother came over. What was interesting was that during the Vietnam War was when my mom was being born and bombs were bursting from the skies and all of that, while this was happening, UCSC students were protesting against the war. My mom came to the United States in 1975 and my father came here around 1980. So they came at different times and they just so happened to be sponsored in San Jose. Which is part of the reason why San Jose has such a large immigrant community, and a robust Vietnamese community as well.

What I find to be compelling about this all is that these narratives are all intertwined. And without the opportunity for my parents to be able to flee and create a new life for themselves in the United States, I wouldn't be here today. I really wouldn't be here today. Many students at UC Santa Cruz have immigrant families and immigrant backgrounds, where their parents had to come here and build a life for themselves. And to be able to go to college is such an incredible opportunity and it's something that my parents have always pushed me to achieve because they really did come here with nothing.

My father, he had to escape the Vietnam War at the age of thirteen. His parents had died in Vietnam, so he was traveling as an orphan over to the United States, not knowing much English and having to build that from ground up, for himself in the United States.

And my mom's parents came over here with very little as well, and had to build themselves up in San Jose, and learn English and build an opportunity for themselves here amongst the struggles that immigrants and refugees have to go through.

I think that really relates back to the political narrative that's going on today. The alienation of immigrants and refugees that has been talked about in the White House administration is particularly concerning because I personally have a close connection to the story of immigrant struggles and the refugee narrative. So, relating back to this anti-Vietnam War movement and how my parents are directly tied into the boat people movement of Vietnamese folks coming over—I think that the connection of all of these is important in itself to talk about.

Vanderscoff: That's great. I mean, it's a fascinating full circle moment—

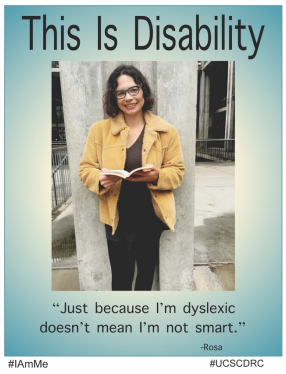
Le: Right, it is.

Vanderscoff: —that your parents were displaced by a war that was being protested here. And then you have the full circle experience of them coming here, and then working on all these movements at a time when immigrants are being demonized yet again. That your voice is a part of the mix here, is historically a remarkable moment.

Le: Right. I think that that kind of summarizes my personal history and my personal background. The immigrant and refugee background that my family has come through—I hold it very close to my heart. So, I am incredibly excited to continue to keep pushing for these issues and protecting marginalized communities because it relates so closely to me, to this whole entire story that I've outlined.

Vanderscoff: Thank you very much.

Rosa Melero



At the time of this interview, Rosa Melero was a senior at Porter College. She majored in art and anthropology. Melero grew up in Oakland and was diagnosed with dyslexia when she was seven years old. While at UC Santa Cruz, Rosa worked for the Disability Resource Center and is a disability rights activist.

Vanderscoff: Today is Thursday, April 13, 2017, and this is Cameron Vanderscoff here for the Student Interviews Oral History Project. What we've been doing at the beginning of this project is asking people to introduce themselves in whatever words they choose, and then start by saying just a little bit about your background.

Early Background

Melero: Okay. My name is Rosa Melero. I am a fourth-year graduating senior, and my majors are anthropology and art double major. I was born and raised in Oakland, California, and I went to a private middle school for students with disabilities. I was diagnosed with dyslexia and ADD when I was seven, and so that fed into the decision of going to that middle school. And then for high school, I decided to go to the public high school near my home. And then that led me to [UC] Santa Cruz.

Vanderscoff: And so then maybe you could reflect a little bit about the differences in those educational contexts, middle school versus high school, going a little further into your educational background. And then we'll move on to Santa Cruz.

Melero: Yeah. So, my middle school was from third grade all the way to eighth, and it had seventy-three students my graduating year. That was the biggest population they'd ever had. It was for students with all kinds of disabilities, whether it was behavioral or cognitive disabilities, and it was incredibly small. My class size, my graduating class was thirteen students, and I'd never been in a class with more than sixteen people, except for elementary school, when I had a class of twenty—and I went to a different elementary school. But back then, I didn't really need to be—let me back up there. My elementary school was mainstreamed students. It had not very many students with disabilities—mainly just non-disabled kids.

My mom and dad were high school sweethearts. My dad is first-generation. His family came over from Mexico right before he was born. They didn't speak, and they still don't speak any English. They were low-income and didn't have any knowledge or education about disabilities. My dad is most likely also an undiagnosed dyslexic.

So, my mom, seeing my dad try to read and write in high school, noticed the similarities with me. Because I didn't read until I was ten, until I was in the fifth grade. And that mainstream elementary school was private, but it was still mainstream. It wasn't working for me—their class structure was not working for me. So, my mom pulled me out and put me in that private school to try to see if they could help me read, which they did. But because of that, everything was super small.

And so, when I went to Skyline, which is my local public high school in Oakland, it was class sizes of thirty to fifty students. The entire school was two thousand. It was the biggest school in Oakland at the time. I was thrown into this school. I felt like a needle in a haystack. I was so overwhelmed by all the people. But I got used to it pretty quickly—I was fine.

The one thing that really helped and made the transition easier was that I had a case manager. A case manager is someone who handles an individual education planner, IEP, that provides or mandates students with disabilities have accommodations to help them be able to learn at the same level as their peers. And my case manager, Mr. Coleman, was really dedicated to his work and made sure that I had the support and access and materials that I needed to be able to learn. And because of his support and his and the rest of the special education department, I was able to get As and often be at the top of my class. Because I was dedicated to learning—I just needed that support and accommodations to help me be able to learn at that same rate.

And he actually was instrumental in me coming to Santa Cruz. I knew I wanted to study marine biology and art when I was in high school. And I love the ocean. But when I came to Santa Cruz, I realized that I'd have to take thirteen math courses. And I think I might have dyscalculia, which is basically like the dyslexia of math. I can't retain math in my brain. It just doesn't work. You could ask me to multiply almost anything above ten and I wouldn't be able to do it in my head.

But he's from Santa Cruz, and he helped me fill out applications for all the UCs and supported me in that. It was between UC Davis and UC Santa Cruz, and I chose Santa Cruz because it had an ocean. I like being in the trees—I feel like I'm in a treehouse all the time.

And so, spring of 2013 came, and here I am now. Yeah, I got in down here.

Vanderscoff: So why [did you choose] UC in the first place, as opposed to a CSU or a private school or out-of-state?

Melero: I'd actually really wanted to go to Brown University. And I didn't get in there. And now I realize that I don't know if I would have been happy there. I love California. And I loved this campus. I love Davis and this campus. Both of them had things I liked about them. I was

accepted to Berkeley, but I'd lived in Oakland all my life. And I was thinking, being away but not too far away, was nice. So, I decided to decline their offer and then come here instead.

Coming to UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: So you come to Santa Cruz, and then if we can go into that first day, first week—

Melero: First day—oh, man. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: Just your first impressions of it relative to home.

Melero: So I was super excited up until the moment that I got in the car to come here, to do the two-hour drive over the hill to come to Santa Cruz. And I had never moved from the house that I was raised in, the eighteen years at that time that I had been alive. We'd moved to my Grandma's once for six months while we renovated our house. But she lives three houses down from us. So, I'd never moved out of Oakland before. I was super excited. I had all my college stuff and I was going to get dorm-mates and be on my own. And then the realization that my family was not going to be as close as they were kind of hit me. I'm very, very close with my brother, my younger brother, and my parents.

I remember them, at the end of getting me all settled, my mom helped me make my bed and my brother was making jokes with my roommate. And then they were like, "All right, it's time for us to go." I was standing by the car. I just remember starting to sob because they were leaving me. I couldn't stand it. That homesickness, I never really realized could be painful. Like it actually was physically painful. I spent the first week feeling that. Actually, maybe the first seventy-two hours feeling that.

And then I met people. I met two of my very close friends that I still have today. We all lived in the same hall. We became instantly close. And that homesickness started to fade away.

Disability Resource Center

Another thing that made the transition easier was that I had already had my first appointment with the Disability Resource Center and was already in their system. And Isabel Dees, who no longer works for the Disability Resource Center but was a coordinator at the time, was my first face that I could put to UCSC. She's amazing—she gave me the rundown of all the accommodations I could receive, that I would get help. I had this feeling that I wasn't alone anymore and even though my parents weren't nearby, I was going to be fine. I kind of grew up really quickly in that first week.

I'd always been self-reliant, because you have to be when you need to get things from teachers and stuff. You can't always rely on your parents. Because often in high school, my teachers responded better to me asking and telling them I needed things than to my parents or case managers doing it for me. So that helped me definitely get where I needed to be when I got here. But having that friendly face definitely helped, too.

Vanderscoff: And how did you learn about the opportunity of the DRC in the first place?

Melero: I made sure I knew my rights in high school. I had one teacher in high school who denied me accommodations. I'd never had that happen before because usually teachers are very conforming to the ADA, the law. I had to bring in my mom and Mr. Coleman, my case manager, and threaten her with a lawsuit if she didn't comply. I can't even remember how that got resolved. But because of that I knew my rights and I knew that wherever I would go, there would be—as long as it was in the US—there would be accommodations. By law that would happen, and if there weren't, then I was going to make my own way there.

In the last four years, I've definitely realized that Santa Cruz, in my opinion, is the best school for students with disabilities—because we are the most liberal and accommodating in providing accommodations for students, in my own opinion. My brother goes to UC Davis now and he

didn't get the same welcoming vibe and support that I did. That could just be one experience. But I'm happy that I chose here because of that.

Vanderscoff: And so when you talk about that welcoming vibe and support, to what extent is that something you're seeing at the DRC? Or when you think about your early classes and social situations, is that extending to your instructors and then to your peers?

Melero: Generally people here are pretty nice. I was surprised when I first came here, because walking across the street, people in cars always let you go first, where in the city, that doesn't happen. And that was like my definition of niceness. (Vanderscoff laughs)

My first classes were all tenured professors who'd been around a while and knew what the DRC was and knew that I would be coming to them with this letter, or they had had students in the past come to them with this letter and say, "I have a disability. These are my accommodations." But apparently, I found out later—and this is what caused the program that I run, that I'll talk about in a second, to be created—was in 2012 there was a campus climate survey that the university did. And it found that there were three main groups of students that didn't feel welcome on campus. It was students with disabilities, black students, and LGBTQ students. And I think they worked on black and LGBTQ students first, and then they decided to work on disabled students in 2015.

But when I first got here in 2013, I felt welcomed. But I had really nice professors, too, and professors who kind of went out of their way to accommodate me just on a personal level. Their personality was very open and not intimidating at all. And then the Disability Resource Center being so welcoming and open made it feel like I wasn't inconveniencing anybody by trying to get these accommodations. I think a lot of students here often are afraid to give their professors accommodation letters, or even seek help from the DRC, because it's: "I don't want to inconvenience anybody. It's just another task that somebody's going to have to do for me." It's really not that hard to accommodate students.

Vanderscoff: I look forward to talking about that arc that you're describing throughout your education here. But first, before we go any further, I wanted to talk about those seventy-two hours when you first—

First Impressions of UC Santa Cruz

Melero: First got here.

Vanderscoff: And I'm curious, then, about your impressions of Porter and this new setting that you found yourself in relative to home. That could be the core course, that could be whatever that is, but comparing that to Oakland, where you came from, and then thinking about themes of adapting and adjusting to here.

Melero: Well, Porter was interesting because it's like a giant apartment building, but every room has no bathroom and no sink and no kitchen. And I was not used to not being able to cook. I had to learn how to use a microwave—because we didn't have one—which was really entertaining. The first couple of meals I made exploded. But it was also that I had these roommates that I had met over—we'd all Facebook messaged each other and talked, but had never really met before. And we're acquaintances now, but we never really became all that close. Maybe closer back then, but we grew apart. It was weird living with other people and navigating that balance between being respectful of other people's spaces. And people don't realize that the roommate agreement, when the RAs give it to you to fill out at the beginning of the year, they don't realize how important it is, and how important it is to be specific in what you want. I think it was hard living with new people, and people that didn't share maybe some of the same background that I had. It was just a different experience than living with people that I had known all my life, my parents and my brother. I shared a room with my brother up until we were fourteen. And we were perfectly fine, because we were siblings. It was new, living with other people and being mindful of my own space and mindful of theirs, and having them show me the same courtesy that I showed them.

My mom did most of the grocery shopping up until I could drive—or actually, my parents shared the grocery shopping. But my mom was adamant about making sure we had vegetables, greens, and a well-balanced diet. And coming here, suddenly there was no one telling me what to eat and what to do. But I found myself so conditioned to what she had drilled into me all those years that I could not buy sugar cereal—we were not allowed to have sugar cereal like Fruit Loops or anything. As much as I love Fruit Loops, I will not buy them, because my mom said no. But there was a realization for a couple of weeks at the beginning that I can buy whatever I want, as long as I budget it. Which is hard, figuring out how to budget your money as a student—yeah, that was fun.

But then also the structure of the classes here are so different than high school. High school was 8:00 to 3:00 every single day, five days a week. I had hour-long classes, and there were seven in a day. All of a sudden, I had these classes that were an hour and 45 minutes long twice a week. And I had to make sure that I was there on time. No one was telling me to get there on time. No one was telling me to go to class. It was up to me. And I kind of flourished off that freedom—I loved it. I didn't fall behind because I wanted to do well. But I found that I enjoyed class more when there weren't people telling me I had to go, my parents telling me I had to go. I wanted to go for myself. And that was nice, that feeling of self-reliance, and knowing that what I was doing was something I wanted to do. What else? Oh, and the fact that I could go home in between classes and take a nap was really nice, or that I had the freedom to go downtown and go shopping if I wanted to was nice.

I had to figure out how to budget my time, too, as well as my money, so that I had time to do everything, including my homework.

Vanderscoff: So one question that I actually meant to ask earlier was: how did you wind up at Porter in the first place?

Melero: Porter is the art school, the art college. And I, ever since I was a little kid, I've always loved art, because art was a way in which I could understand what other people were trying to say, and what I could express myself. When I see writing, written language, I can speak English and I can understand English. But written words and writing down words, it's like another language—it's a foreign language to me, and it's one that I'm still learning to this day.

When I was a kid and in elementary school, not being able to read while everybody else was reading was hard, because I stood out from the rest of the class. And my best friend, who actually coincidentally goes here too, would read out loud to me in the corner when we had quiet time. We were the only students allowed to talk during that time. That was fun, but it showed the fact that I was different from everybody else. Which wasn't necessarily a bad thing—it was just hard when the world communicates through written language and you're just not good at that.

So, art was my way of being able to understand what other people were trying to say. Like comics—comics were great because I could understand them, too, and I didn't have to read the words. And drawing was my way of communicating in like a letter sense what I wanted to say back. So that love for art stuck with me all the way up until high school. And my ceramics teacher in high school influenced me to become an art major in college. And said, "You're good. You should continue this. You should continue your art passion."

I got here and read all the descriptions of the colleges. And Porter sounded like the best one, the one I was most likely to thrive at. And I'm really glad I chose Porter.

Vanderscoff: Great. And so, before we move on to then talk about some of your classes more towards your major, is there anything else you'd like to say about your early time at Porter, the core course or social experiences—thinking about that, situating yourself at UCSC?

Melero: I'm a very social person. I like people. And those friends that I made in my hall, the two friends that were in my hall, as I said earlier, filled that void of homesickness and became people I could rely on and have fun with. And I made a lot of other friends in classes too during that time, that I may not talk to all the time, but whenever we see each other around campus it's always a nice conversation.

I always hear about my mom's stories from college, how she had friends. I don't think she sees them very often. Now I have those stories of my own. The friends that I made throughout the four years that I've been here I may not talk to all the time. But they were still important and key pieces to helping me become who I am and making the decisions that I made. And whenever I see them on campus, it's always pick back up where we left off. It's nice to know that that's still there, that friendship is still there. I like that social part—I feel like Santa Cruz brought me that social part as well.

Majoring in Art and Anthropology

Vanderscoff: Fabulous. So then, so you come in with the idea of being an art major, you have this conception in your mind. So, could you talk, then, about how that plays out in reality? The early art classes, and then that development.

Melero: So, I'm going to start from orientation. Orientation was, I actually wasn't too happy about coming here. I think the worst part about it was that I was really sick when I came here. I came with my best friend and a couple other people who I'd gone to high school with, and then her friends who were all coming here to school. And at that point, it was kind of that transition period between relying on my mom to help me with things, like reading and writing, and relying on myself to be able to do or find ways around that.

When I got here, I wanted to sign up for oceanography classes and art classes for my two majors. But orientation had us sign up for classes. I had to read a bunch of information and

there was no one to help me, and I felt awkward about asking other parents to help me. And I didn't get into the art classes that I wanted to. I wanted to get into photography, intro to photography, and there were no spaces left by the time I got there, or by the time I got my time to sign up for classes.

I signed up for some other classes I was iffy about, or less excited about coming to Santa Cruz. And then a week before I came here spots opened up and I got all the classes I wanted to. I started with Photography 80 and Porter core and oceanography. I loved the oceanography class. It was amazing—it was so much fun, and the professor was great, Gary Griggs was amazing. It was my first lecture of 100 or 200 people. I was this freshman who had no idea where anything was on campus. I had scouted out all my classes the day before so I wouldn't be late.

But I got into this class and I was terrified that I was in the wrong class and that I was the only freshman. And I looked around and I started to recognize people from my hall. Then this professor walks in and he's super animated. I think I've only had one other professor that still writes on the chalkboard—he wrote on the chalkboard. And I loved that class—I remember calling my parents and telling my dad all about what I had just learned in class for like the first five or six weeks.

Then I went to my college advisor and went to see how many more ocean classes I would need, or how I should space out my time to be a marine biologist. And they let me know that I had like thirteen math classes, and that I had to pass Algebra 1 to even start that. And I was like, nope, that's not going to happen; it's not something I can do. Even with accommodations, I can't hold math and other facts in my brain and be able to display them. I was really adamant. I just wanted to work with sea animals. Why did I need to know math for that? And I know there's some reason, but I don't believe in it.

So, I just decided that I could do that on my own time. I still love the ocean. But I'll just figure out a way to volunteer with a program or something instead. I've always loved science. I could

always understand the way science works, like the body and biology. So, my Porter College advisor recommended that I should do anthropology, because I didn't need math, besides the general ed requirements for that. And I was like, all right, I'll give that a try.

But art—I had Katy Perry's photography class. I now know that she makes that class hard because lots of people take it because they think it's going to be easy. I enjoyed that class immensely. But it was very hard, because you had to remember two hundred—maybe I'm blowing that number out of proportion—but it seemed like two hundred different artists, what their styles were, what they were known for, and the dates that they were doing their work. I just remember being so overwhelmed by that, but it was still fun. It didn't deter me—that difficulty didn't deter me from becoming an art major.

And after I made it through the prereqs for art, I started getting into more of the foundation and upper division classes. And I found a professor named Norman Locks, who's a photography professor. He's amazing—he's the most kind and gentle teacher I've ever met here. And his famous thing that I like to quote is, he always just says, "Just go shoot more. Go take more photos. Just shoot more." And it's really what you've just got to do; you've just got to produce work in his class. And he's super laid back—it was that environment that I needed to figure out that photography was what I wanted to focus on.

I've taken painting and printmaking classes along the way, and I love them. But Norman definitely has made a difference in what I wanted to study, and what my focus was. I wanted to do photography. Which was something I'd—I mean, I took photos before and I liked it. But I had never really thought about having a professional photography career until he came into my life.

That first year, I had professors who were really accommodating and really understood that I was working as hard as I could, I just needed a little bit of support to be able to make it all the way. And sophomore year I decided to take on anthropology. I had another amazing teacher

that made me become an anthropologist because I loved her so much. Her name was Sarah Schrader, and she was a lecturer, visiting—she was here for two, three years? She taught bioanthropology. She was also super open and very kind and accommodating. We had three tests in a quarter and each were like ninety questions long, and I found out very quickly that I was struggling to even complete the test because it was so much information and so much reading and circling bubbles and stuff. So, I talked to her about it. And she was like, "Well, let's just scrap that test. I'll just give you five long answer questions. And I'll write for you. You just tell me everything you know about it, everything you know about that topic." And I did really, really well—I loved that way of being tested because I could spit out all the information that I could remember. Often it was the same things that were on the test but things I would forget, or would get tired and couldn't think about when I was doing that long, multiple choice test. So, stuff like that openness and the willingness to accommodate opened the doors to my academic life here. And because of Sarah Schrader, I decided to continue in anthropology, decided that I actually really, really enjoy all the aspects of it, the bio, the archeology, and the cultural aspects of anthropology.

Vanderscoff: And I'm curious, then, what sort of dialogue, if any, do you sense between these two majors that you're doing. Or do they feel like separate endeavors?

Melero: No, they're really similar in that anthropology is the study of humans. And every culture, it seems, has some form of art. Art is a prominent thing in human life. I found that they actually make a good connection. I have more insight, now that I'm an art major and I've taken history of art classes and stuff, into other anthropology classes. And I want to combine the two majors by taking photos of artifacts and documenting cultures. And if I can, I'd love to draw or sketch archeological sites for textbooks or for field schools. I would also love to document the different cultures and the different art practices that go on and stuff like that. I think it's important to make sure that the arts that cultures do don't die out, because they're often very prominent—they have meaning.

Vanderscoff: So an anthropological photography practice.

Melero: Yes, I would love to do that.

Vanderscoff: Before we move into talking about some of your work with the DRC and some other topics, is there anything further that you'd like to say about how art and anthropology have either worked for you or inspired you, key classes, anything else like that that seems important to discuss—differences between the two?

Melero: I have to say, both are very demanding, but in different ways. I had an art teacher who said that if you spend less than twenty hours on an art piece, a painting piece or something, or drawing, it's not good. You haven't put your full effort into it. I found that that is true in my case; I often will spend twenty to forty hours on one painting, or one drawing. And that's a long time—that's a whole entire week of going after classes, going at five and staying until twelve or two in the morning in the art studio. But I love that kind of work because it doesn't require me to think all that much.

And at the same time, I love anthropology because it makes my brain have to think. It's just harder. It's a lot of reading and a lot of writing, and a lot of remembering what you're reading and writing. And that's not my forte, but it doesn't mean I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to stop trying to learn as much as I can. Yeah, those were the main differences between the two. The work was equally hard, but harder in different ways.

Vanderscoff: And on the whole, when it came to the openness or the flexibility of these two departments to accommodate you, did you find any significant differences in that regard? Because you're talking about different types of creative and intellectual work.

Melero: For me, it was very different. I don't need accommodations as often for art, because you barely have to write anything, or have to study for anything. In fact, I'm appalled when

professors do have courses that I have to draw and paint and then also read and write for and study for. I just feel like they don't go together—but that's my own stubbornness.

But anthropology, because it's all that reading and writing and ethnographies and whatnot, generally the anthropology department here is very open to students with disabilities and pretty accommodating. But it's always going to be tough. Reading and writing, even with accommodations, is tough. If I have to read more than a paragraph, I tend not to really read all the way through it. Or if it's densely compacted information, I just kind of shut down. Anthropology has a lot of densely compacted information.

The only time I really want to read is when something catches my interest, or is easy to read. Academic articles, and the way that anthropologists write, are generally very difficult and hard to read, and have long, taxing sentences that I can't decode, or it takes me four or five tries to decode. And even then, sometimes I have to go and find someone to read it out loud to me. So, I definitely needed more accommodations for that part, for the reading and writing part. But if anthropology hadn't had any reading or writing in it, I probably would have been fine. I don't think I would need the accommodations that I need today. But of course, you're always going to have reading and writing.

Vanderscoff: So unless there's anything further you'd like to say about those two, and we can also loop back to them later—

Melero: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: So then, moving on to the section on college advocacy and activist involvement in the rubric of finding a voice or building a community or shaping a self. First, I wanted to talk about the DRC, which, you've mentioned what a resource it's been for you personally. But of course, you've also been involved with the DRC as an intern and then in various capacities. So, I'm wondering if you could tell the story of that side of your relationship with the DRC.

Students with Disabilities

Melero: So now I'm kind of in two roles, or maybe three. I'm a student—As the director says, I'm a student first, before anything else. I'm a student, which means that no matter how much I work, I'm always going to be a DRC student and always have that available to me and utilize their resources, which I do every day. But now I'm also an office assistant, so I work at the front as a secretary. And I also lead a program called the Accessibility Leadership Internship, or as I like to call it, ALI (pronounced like "ally") program. And the ALI program stemmed off of what I was talking about earlier, which was that campus climate survey. And the former director a couple of years ago, Peggy Church, wrote a grant to the university asking for money for a student-run program. And they gave us funding for it, so we have like $14,000 from the school to work with each year that it gets renewed. And it's all student-run.

So, they were looking for students to run this program. I just happened to be in there all the time and made a personal connection with my case manager, Isabel Dees. And she recommended me for that position of intern. I had two other interns working with me at the end of sophomore year and then they both graduated. And I continued on as the head intern and started building it up last year, junior year. We started having meetings and deciding what was wrong with the campus, what we needed to do to make the Disability Resource Center more visible, make students with disabilities feel more comfortable. I don't know if I've said our mission statement, but our program is dedicated to making UCSC a more welcoming and inclusive place for students with disabilities. And we started with realizing that the DRC is not very well known, and often people don't really come looking for it unless they have a disability. And even then, sometimes people don't come looking for it, because they're shy about having a disability.

So, we started with how to get to the DRC videos and testimonials about the DRC to encourage other students to come visit us, come see what we offer and what we can do for those with disabilities.

And working at the front, I've realized that during college, a lot of people who haven't had accommodations in the past kind of realize that they might have a disability and need help. So, a lot of students come to us for referrals, or just to know what the next step is, what they can do to get help, or to get a diagnosis, so they can get accommodations. Which is great, because we've seen an increase in that in the last couple of years since the program has started. So, we started having meetings in junior year for DRC students to come and feel they had a place to state their opinion. And we started something called the "This is Disability" media campaign. It stemmed from a project called "The Humans of New York"—I can't remember the artist's name right now.

Vanderscoff: Brandon Stanton.

Melero: Yes. And what he does is he takes photos of people, random people in the street, and then gets a quote from them, or a paragraph quote from them, about anything that's going on in their lives. So, we decided to start taking photos of people from the DRC who volunteered, and getting a quote from them, kind of breaking down the stigma around their disability.

I put mine out there first to see how it would go, so that if there was any lash back, I would take it and not some poor soul from the DRC. I was reading a book in this picture, and my quote was, "Just because I'm dyslexic doesn't mean I'm not smart." Which is something I've gotten a lot, is that people's misconception of dyslexia is that it's an intellectual disability. Like because I can't read, I must not be smart, or it affects my intelligence, when I know that I'm just as smart as the next person. I have that intelligence; I just need different ways of communicating and receiving information.

So, we started putting those around spring quarter of junior year. We had about seven posters, and we want to keep it going. But the problem with those posters is that it's asking people to put themselves out there, even though it's totally anonymous if you want it to be. You don't have to have your face in the photo. It doesn't even have to be a person. It can just mean something to you, as long as it discredits myths about disabilities.

Vanderscoff: What do you think some of those key myths about disabilities are as you've heard them articulated on this particular campus?

Melero: I think, besides the one that I just said, there's definitely a stigma around having disabilities on campus. There's this feeling that if someone goes to the Disability Resource Center, there's something wrong with them, when it's not that at all. It's just that you might need another way of doing something like getting around. It's the same as—especially for invisible disabilities. People who have depression or anxiety—which is a large part of our population at the DRC—there's such a stigma around that. People, when they find out that someone has like depression or bipolar disorder or something, change their attitudes around those people. No wonder those people don't want to come and receive help. People believe they're going to be judged if they come, when in reality, we're in no place to judge you. In fact, you should be proud of coming to get help for your disability. You should be proud of standing up for yourself.

Vanderscoff: You're talking about pride is like the answer to the stigma in some way, right? There's this stigma saying that this is a shameful thing and then you respond with pride. And so maybe if you could reflect on that theme of pride about disabilities, either in terms of yourself, or in terms of stories that you've heard? I think that's a powerful theme to touch on.

Melero: Well, when I was in high school, this is where I got, "You're dyslexic, but you're smart," said to me a lot. It wasn't that people were necessarily trying to be rude or mean. It was that they just didn't understand what those disabilities were. They had never really experienced

anybody with a disability because in high school the students with severe autism were all in separate classes. We had some students with wheelchairs, but that was a disability they could see. And the students with invisible disabilities kind of flew under the radar and didn't feel comfortable coming out.

I figured out early on that if I spoke up and was prideful about the fact that I had a disability and needed help and made a big deal about it, that people were less likely to say something rude or something mean, and more likely to take into consideration the fact that I need some assistance in certain things, like reading and writing. I always chose people in class carefully, who I wanted to read to me out loud, and who I wanted to write. I would choose people who I felt already knew that, not that there was something different about me, but that I might need some more help. Or someone I felt like could understand that more. 'So that was what I would do the first day of class every year, would be figuring out who was my most likely ally and then spreading that awareness through the class. Because if I started with one, then other people began to just follow along and be more considerate.

Vanderscoff: You would share your story with someone you perceived to be—

Melero: Yeah. Share my story. And then other people would hear it. And then they would be more inclined to help. I had one class, Miss [Okatuba's] class, it was a physics class, and it was full of underclassmen. And I was a senior at the time. At first it was kind of like, they were kind of trying to figure out what's wrong with this student. Like she looks "normal," quote unquote "normal." But when I asked one of the girls behind me, who I had had a conversation with at the beginning of class just about who we were and stuff, to read, and I asked her to read out loud to me, she was very kind about it. I explained to her why I needed it. And then people hearing on both sides listened to the conversation and began to ask me questions about what dyslexia was and how I saw words, and like, "Oh, isn't that when you just reverse B and D?"—

which is a common misconception. It's not the way that dyslexia works. 'And that way I got people on my side. I got the support that I needed.

That's how I navigated university as well. I was vocal about it, and by being vocal, people can't mess with me, was my conclusion—including professors couldn't mess with me. But I have never really had a professor who would deny me accommodations. I've had people ask me, because they have no idea what accommodations are. But once they figure out what they are, they don't deny it like the teacher I was talking [about] in high school who denied me my accommodations.

So, bringing that pride to Santa Cruz was, I found, an important part that people were missing here. There wasn't a solidarity thing going on here. And so, we decided last year to do Disability Awareness Week. It was two weeks in May. I had three interns working underneath me at that moment. We made buttons and we made T-shirts, and we got forty volunteers from different classes that we went and presented to, to come out and help us. And we tabled in the Quarry Plaza, which is the main strip of campus, and we asked people to sign a pledge that said "I pledge to be inclusive, aware of students with disabilities on campus, not use derogatory terms or slurs, to support when I can see that I can support students with disabilities, and to validate the lived experience of those with disabilities." By signing that, they got a button, and then at the end of the two weeks they could come back and get a slice of pizza. We had sixty Costco pizzas that we brought up to campus, and then to make it all inclusive, we also had vegetarian and vegan and gluten-free options for students, which I think went over well. It made a difference to show universal design, the way that events could be created. We got over a thousand signatures, so we must have changed something. To this day, I still see those buttons going around. We're going to do it again this year. But I want to get more clubs involved, and more sororities and student orgs and fraternities and what other "entities" there are in the school, and get them on board. Because I feel like once people are more understanding in a social network, that understanding tends to spread to the rest of the student body.

I think the main problem at school is that people don't think about it. Disability is not something that they think about if they don't have one. And the important thing to remember is that everybody in their life will become disabled, most likely, whether you get older and have a bad hip or you're young and you have a disability like dyslexia. Accommodations are not a privilege; they're a right. People often seem to forget that. Accommodations are not there to help students cheat. They're there for those students to be able to learn at the same academic level as their peers, and also to be able to live comfortably. If you have a physical disability that makes it hard to walk around campus, this campus is incredibly hilly and you may not be able to get someplace. Having that understanding of other people is important, especially in making someone feel welcomed here.

Vanderscoff: And so I'm curious about the task of this awareness raising that you're talking about. Because of course, when you're talking about the community of people with disabilities, you're talking about a wide spectrum of different disabilities, some of them visible, some of them not, some of them more obviously embodied, some of them perhaps less so. And so, I'm curious about that task, because when you say "people with disabilities" you mean one thing, but you also mean a lot of different things. So, I'm curious then about what sort of conversations you've been in within something like ALI about how to go about programming to educate, to raise awareness, and articulate the idea of pride, as you've been doing?

Melero: So our main two target audiences that we feel the need to change is students need to be more aware. But also, professors and staff and faculty need to be more aware. And it's actually the staff, faculty, and professors that really make the difference in a student's life. Maybe I should start by saying professors and lecturers and actually anybody at the university are not required to have any training or knowledge about the Disability Resource Center. They just get this thing in their email saying you have to put this blurb about DRC accommodations in your syllabus. And I kind of feel like that's it; that's the extent of their knowledge about the DRC. Many of them don't even know where it is and don't really even understand what the

letters that we bring them are, the accommodations letters. And they often don't understand that sometimes the way that they structure their classes makes everything more difficult for students who have different disabilities. And cluing them on in how to make their classes more [like] the universal design, which is designed for the most amount of people. Like different learners, and also taking into account different disabilities, and the effects that those disabilities might have on people. For example, requiring attendance might be kind of blockades to students who have like a chronic illness or something, that can't make it, or are not going to be well enough to make it to every single class. Or making students take notes in your class and using that as part of a grade will discount students like me who can't keep up with notes, who can't take their own notes, and have other students take them for them. And just giving them little ways of making their classes more designed, like wearing a microphone, making sure that if a sign language interpreter is needed, that the student who needs it has a space at the front of the class to be able to see the interpreter. Even things like not using Times New Roman font, because the font has feet on the bottom of it that blend together for students like me. When I read, I often can't distinguish certain letters from each other, because the feet make it very confusing. So, using Arial or things without those. Using larger text. And then also making sure that all your text, if it can't be scanned, the DRC has a copy of it so they can get it converted to alternative media text, so that students like me can also access it earlier on in the course, instead of waiting for the first day of class and then buying a book. Or if we buy it on the web, waiting for it to come and then taking it to the DRC, getting it chopped up—what they do is they chop off the spines of the book and then they run all the pages through a high-speed scanner and it comes up on this program. And we have a bunch of student workers who go through and make sure that the scans are going to be readable by this software. Then they get uploaded to a document which I and other students with the same program can access over the web, and the program reads it out loud to us, which is incredibly helpful, especially when you can't read. But if there's a delay in time that it takes us to get those books, then we're missing out on half the

class. So just stuff like that, little things that they can do to make this college experience flow more smoothly for students with disabilities.

If everything was universally designed, there wouldn't be much of a need for accommodations anymore, because you would already have those worked into your class. Our main problem that we see with professors and faculty is that they don't have any training, or sometimes they don't even know what universal design is, where the DRC is, and what the DRC does. And also that—I don't like using this because I feel like it's kind of a threat—but that accommodations are mandated by law for students with disabilities to be able to have access to those accommodations. Sometimes people don't know that, and that can cause a lot of trouble for the university. But it causes a lot of trouble for students when our accommodations are not met.

Students may not run into a lot of disabled students, or may not think about all the disabilities that exist out there, and are often not very aware of what they're saying or what they're doing might make those people feel uncomfortable. One example is that on our This is Disability campaign last year, we put some posters up in Baskin Engineering. Those posters got vandalized. The person who had provided the quote said something about using accommodations and how they helped her succeed. And the poster had writing on it that crossed out "accommodations" and said "cheating." As a student with a disability, that makes your heart sink. Because if that's what everyone thinks of you, of course, you're not going to want to use your accommodations if you think that everyone thinks that you're cheating. And so, I feel like it's important to make sure that students also know what accommodations are and why they're there; that means spreading that awareness that there are different disabilities and the effects of each disability and why those accommodations exist.

And also, clubs and organizations are required to put in their text, whenever they put up fliers and stuff, "If you need accommodations, please contact so and so." Sometimes it says, "Please contact the DRC." But that doesn't always mean that the students who might want to go to that

feel very comfortable asking for those accommodations. Whereas if, again, the club's just incorporated some accessible means into their programs and into the way that they run their events, it would make them so much more accessible to students who wouldn't even need to ask for accommodations. I think another thing that they need to do is advertise that they have made these adjustments to the way that they run their clubs, so that everybody feels more comfortable coming in and feeling like they don't need to ask, if they're shy about asking, or they just have the peace of mind that their needs are already met without them having to do anything about them.

Vanderscoff: So over the period of time you've been here, where have you seen the needle move on these issues in terms of the response to some of these concrete initiatives that you've been launching through ALI or otherwise?

Melero: We've done professor and department outreach. I come in with a thirty-minute presentation about what the DRC does. It's kind of like Disability and Accommodation 101 in 30 minutes. Which isn't enough time, but I talk really fast. Which probably isn't all that accommodating for some of the professors, but if their departments don't let me have a longer time, then so be it. So that has been helpful for some departments. Because it's not mandatory. It's advised—like the DRC director goes by and advises that they have me come in—but it's not required. And I found that the groups of people that I have gone to are very receptive and often are like, "Oh, that's what we need to do." Or, "I can do that. It's so easy." There's that click like, "Oh, okay. Something I could do is just tweak the way I present my slides, or tweak the way I talk in class and it will help a lot of students out," which is very true. But many departments haven't had, or don't want to have, or don't have the time to have that presentation.

And then the DRC in, I think, 2014 or '15 we moved into the space that was next door to the hallway that the DRC used to be in, which was this long, like 10-foot hallway that had a bunch of offices and wasn't very welcoming. Now we have this whole room where we have a front

office. Secretaries can sit. There's a lab for people to use the computers that have all of our software on it. And there's a scanner for students who need to scan their books. We also have couches and coffee and tea and we have knitting. And people who aren't even DRC students, maybe note takers or just students who've heard about the DRC come in. I've seen people be more willing and more comfortable coming into the DRC. There's not like an automatic repulse from walking into our doors. Or sometimes people will go the wrong way and come into our office. And I used to see them like, "Oh, it's the DRC! I don't belong here," and run away. Now I feel like they're much more comfortable walking in and asking us, where is the dean of students' office and stuff like that, and then looking around, maybe getting a cup of tea, and then they leave. But just the fact that people want to come in and see what we're doing, or come in and see what jobs we have open—because we always need more note takers, it seems like—that kind of environment makes the DRC not so ostracized from the rest of campus. Because not only are DRC students using it, but also students without disabilities who just want a place to sit down for a little while.

I've seen two students just come in and sit on the couch. They have like a meeting time every week. They just sit on the couch and talk about whatever for like an hour, and then they get up and leave. That's kind of like their place holder in the day. And using the DRC as a place just to relax and have a chat with somebody makes me happy to watch and to see. And it probably brings more of a community vibe to the center, which it definitely needs.

Vanderscoff: That's great. So that covers a lot of the questions that I have. But before we move on to the next subject, do you think there's an important event or initiative that we've missed, or some aspect of the DRC for you personally, or via your own involvement, that we ought to discuss?

Melero: I do want to say that everything I'm saying about disability and my disability with dyslexia is my own way of seeing it and my own personal opinion, and not everybody else has

the same one, and not everyone else sees disability or dyslexia the same way. Everybody is entitled to their own opinion. But this is just how I see it and how I've seen other people see it.

The Santa Cruz Community

Vanderscoff: Thank you. So, we've covered a couple different topics now. And switching gears a little now, there's a few areas I want to cover before we get to some of the current events that have been happening. And the first one is, so we've been talking a lot about the campus, but the campus has a particular context. So, I'm curious about what sort of a role the city or Santa Cruz County has played in your time here. And that could be everything from going down to shop, or that could be as a social or recreational setting, community spaces, or any linkages you might have with community groups there. Just thinking about what those links are for students between the community and—

Melero: The city and the school.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, exactly.

Melero: Let's see. The bus system is amazing. That's really how I see the campus and the community connected, the Metro station and the buses that run to and from campus to town. Because that's how I got around for three out of my four years, was bussing. Actually, all the way up until last winter, I've always taken the bus everywhere. And even now, it's sometimes more convenient than trying to take a car and park somewhere. I do feel like sometimes there's a bit of a disconnect between campus and school because we're so far away. There's not really a direct—not only are the living accommodations far away from the base, but the entire campus is far away from the downtown area. It's not like Berkeley, where basically the campus is in the middle of the city, which I think changes its vibe a bit. But there're a lot of students in town. We are a huge part of the population in Santa Cruz. I did a volunteer thing with De Laveaga elementary school in Santa Cruz, where I went in and helped them with an art project to sell at

their annual auction. That was really the most amount of connection I had to the community. I loved it. It was fun to hang out with all these little kids and see the similar aspects I saw to living in Oakland, and then also the different aspects of being in Santa Cruz. But I feel like there could be more relationships, besides the fact that a lot of the jobs in Santa Cruz are done by students. Downtown, there's always a student in every café that you go into. But I feel like there definitely could be more of a community-building aspect between Santa Cruz city and the university, since we do make up a big population of it.

Vanderscoff: What gives you the sense that there's that gap?

Melero: Just because I personally am not seeing very many like, "Come down to the community center and volunteer for something," or something like that. I have seen other students who have found programs the city and the university are working on together. Like there was a garden project over by the Boardwalk that was going on, that was between city residents and Santa Cruz students. I don't know if it got shut down or not—but stuff like that.[12] Or, I know that the education department had a lot of students go into the schools around Santa Cruz and volunteer. I think that's important. But I think it also would be great to have more connection, maybe even with the local high schools, getting the students ready for college, telling them their options, showing them what university life is like. I feel like that was also a big key in my role of going to school, was that I had the chance to go and see Santa Cruz, and I had the chance to go see Davis and Berkeley. But Santa Cruz students might not know that this university is as beautiful as it is, or that what they actually want is really close to home. Yeah, I feel like maybe more outreach between both the school and the city, for students to be a part of that community downtown would be helpful. Although there was one time, the Walk a Mile in

[12] The Beach Flats Community Garden has been cultivated by gardeners from the largely Latino neighborhood for over two decades. The land which hosts the garden is leased to the city of Santa Cruz by the Santa Cruz Seaside Company, which operates the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. In 2015, the Seaside Company wanted to take back part of the land for its landscaping needs. Community organizers were able to successfully negotiate for a three-year extension on the lease, saving the garden for now. For more on the Beach Flats Community Garden see http://beachflatsgarden.org/

Her Shoes event that took place last year, I think last May or June, and that was a walk a mile down West Cliff Drive along the ocean. That had students and community members walking together, which was nice to see. Nice to see that walk and that community vibe—but more things like that. I just don't see it very often. And unfortunately, our program, the way our funding is structured is that we can only spend money on the university and not off campus.

Vanderscoff: This is the DRC, or this is one of your majors?

Melero: No, the money for the ALI program.

Vanderscoff: Right. So, one follow-up question on that is have you remained living on campus the whole time? Or have you moved off at some point? I'm curious about that switch and then what that meant for your study here?

Melero: I did two years on campus, two years in Porter and two years off campus. I liked living in Porter. I think it was a good first experience, good college experience. I feel like everybody should live on campus for at least a year because it gives you the opportunity to make friends, create your space, and then if you want to move off, move off. I've actually enjoyed moving off campus much more than I have been on campus. I think that might have to do with food. Because I don't eat all that much. Or I eat the normal amount for my weight and size, but the money that we were spending to pay for the dining hall, five-day meal plans, was outrageously expensive. Sometimes I wouldn't even get the nutrients that I needed in the meals that they had. I had to jump around to different colleges. But I think, ultimately, I just like making my own food, to be honest.

I now live with a woman in her sixties. She's a friend of my high school teacher's parents. It's just me and her living together. And it's really nice and I love it. I guess that through her I've seen more of a part of the community, because her friends come over and they talk about things

like the Homeless Garden Project and helping schools out and doing things in the community—things I would never have heard of if I hadn't lived with her.

Vanderscoff: And then how does living off campus change your relationship to your college, Porter? Or does it? And then to your department or your community at the DRC, for that matter?

Melero: I definitely say it's hard to get to things, living off campus. I don't really feel like there's much of a disconnect. I think living on campus for two years kind of cemented my relationship with Porter. All my friends moved off campus, so we're all pretty close to each other in town, and easy to get to. My main concern was, was I going to be near to the people that I wanted to be near to? I do think that living on campus for those first two years was important for not only cementing our social relationship, but also for getting my bearings about how I had to do school work.

One thing I don't miss about Porter is people yelling in the Porter quad in the middle of the night, at like four in the morning, when I'm trying to get some sleep. Yeah, that was not fun. But living on my own, living on my own has also made me more independent. Even more so because I have to remember to cook for myself, I have to remember to eat. Whereas the dining hall just does everything for you—cook, clean—all I have to do is go there and eat. I do miss that part.

Oh also, I don't hear about or go to as many on-campus events anymore. I did last quarter because I had a class that mandated that we go to a couple of events and we decided to go to on-campus ones. But I don't see as many things on campus anymore, which is kind of sad. I wish I did. I probably should keep my eyes out for that, since I'm graduating and I want to go to at least a couple more shows. I also feel like it's harder to join clubs when you don't live on campus. It's harder to be part of things because if you don't have a car you have to take the bus. Staying on campus for meetings that end at nine o'clock at night are not ideal unless you have

someone to drive you home, because you're going to be waiting in the cold for a bus that may never come, or doesn't ever feel like it will come.

National Politics

Vanderscoff: So one question that I'm asking everyone in this project one way or another is about larger political events that have happened and their impact at Santa Cruz. I mean, most recently there's the election, of course. But I'm very curious about how either the election went down or other global events or domestic events, and what you've observed that impact to be for you as a student here, and then on the scene here.

Melero: The first one I can think of is, well, besides Trump being elected, which was hard for me, was the tuition hike that happened sophomore year and I think again last year. Was it last year? I can't remember which year it was. But the fact that the university was going to raise our tuition again to astronomical prices made a lot of students angry. That was when a lot of the marching happened and a lot of closing off campus and making a statement happened. What I find funny about these things is that I can't remember the outcome, like what happened, what was the decision the campus made about the tuition hike? So that was a big event that I remember.

There were a lot of events that happened right before I came to Santa Cruz, like President Obama being elected was a big one, and Sandy Hook was also a big one. That changed how I saw a lot of the world and what needed to change in the world. The shootings in Orlando, Florida, at the gay nightclub was devastating not only to me, but to my friends who are part of that community. And it was horrifying to hear about and to watch and think that that kept on happening.

And the Trump election—anyone who would make fun of a reporter for having a disability—a physical or a visible disability—on public national news does not deserve my respect at all. And

that made me, when he was elected, the day after that happened, what was it, November ninth? The entire DRC was just filled with anxiety from everybody. And that anxiety still hasn't really left. It's still there. Especially right now with the confirming of Neil—

Vanderscoff: Gorsuch?

Melero: Gorsuch. He is actually strongly against the ADA and has ruled twice in his career against students who needed, or against people who were discriminated against because they had disabilities. And he believes that accommodations are just, we should have the bare minimum. By bare minimum, that doesn't mean the accommodations that the DRC provides. I'm sure he would take almost all of them away, if he could. And that is terrifying, especially to someone who relies on the accessibility of those accommodations to be able to keep up with the rest of their peers. I can't believe that he's been approved. It's disheartening to believe that people wouldn't see past that, especially when disability doesn't affect any one group of people. It affects every gender, every sex, every race, every ethnicity, age. It doesn't discriminate against anybody. It just comes with time. Like I said earlier, it will affect everybody at some point in their lives. Yeah, that's upsetting to me, that everything that I'm working for right now could be taken away by this current political power.

Vanderscoff: And so I'm curious about how you and the community of students with disabilities, how you're practicing self-care in a time like this, and then how you're finding ways to continue to do your studies, to do your work as these disturbing developments happen on the national stage.

Melero: Definitely having places and people to talk with about it is important. Self-care for me is in that realm of being able to talk with other people about it. And remembering personally to eat. I don't eat when I'm either unhappy or stressed out, and both of those things make me unhappy and stressed out. And I think making sure that people know that no matter what happens, we're going to keep fighting. The DRC is a safe place for those students who are

nervous about what I might be nervous about. They can come in and talk about it and have that place and have that security to know that they're not alone and that people are fighting for them. I think it just drives me to want to make a statement, a louder, bolder statement, and more progress in the school. Because even though it's just one school, if we could show an example of what accommodations do, and what effect universal design has on students, if we can't change the political minds, we might be able to change the minds of those in the community, which hopefully would have a stronger say than those in power.

Accommodating Students with Disabilities

Vanderscoff: You mentioned very early in our conversation here that you think that although Santa Cruz has faults, it is relatively good on the issues of accommodations for students with disabilities, particularly when you compared it, you said, for example, to Davis. So as a way of sort of summing that topic up and then coming to our concluding part here, could you say a little bit about how you've experienced that to be so? And then a bit more about why you say that.

Melero: I say that because the DRC offers preliminary accommodations. So that means that if a student doesn't have a diagnosis yet, they're not just left out in the cold. They might receive, if they have enough of a case, they might receive accommodations for a quarter, giving them time to get their diagnosis and bring it back to the DRC. And then the DRC would be able to solidify it and send out those accommodations for those students. But other universities don't do that. You have to have your referral or documentation there.

And also, we work with students closely. I say "we"—I don't actually have any say in this. But I've seen the DRC work with students closely, even if their IAP [Individual Accommodation Plan] from high school wasn't really done very well, or wasn't sufficient, they will still take it and work with you to either get a new diagnosis, or just make the best of what you have. That's my brother's problem right now with Davis, is that his old IAP from high school wasn't done

correctly. It was a new school and they didn't really have a disability department. Someone just kind of wrote up a couple of quick notes and said that was his IAP. And that doesn't fly with Davis.

Testing is really expensive for stuff like this, and it's also time-consuming. And students don't always have that time at that moment to do these things. The DRC in Santa Cruz recognizes that and works around it, works for their students, rather than making their students work with them. And I think that is really important in a student's experience.

Grading and Evaluations

Vanderscoff: Excellent. I wanted to loop back, actually, to your academic work in your departments. When I was here, there was still narrative evaluations given in classes. They were made optional late in my time here. Traditionally evaluations were always very strong in art. And so, I'm curious whether you've received any formal narrative evaluations, like paragraphs about your work through My UCSC or something like this. And then, regardless of that, just some thoughts as to grades in arts and anthropology, or the sorts of assessments that you've gotten and how that helps you or not in your work as a student.

Melero: Are professors required to give you feedback over My UCSC?

Vanderscoff: They're not. They used to be. My understanding is that it's now optional.

Melero: I've never received one. That would be helpful. But I've never received one. I think our classes just got way too big. Although some of them, twenty students doesn't seem like a lot. I feel like the professor could do it. But my experience is that in art you get a lot more critiques, because that's part of art, which help you a lot. And then the final studio day, people come in and you can kind of overhear them talk about your work, which gives you more critique when people don't even know that you're the one that made it. Which is great—I like that. And then I like to step in and say, "Actually, this is about—"

Vanderscoff: What kind of stuff do you hear on studio days? (laughs)

Melero: Some stuff is funny. I did a series of work trying to explain what it's like to be dyslexic. I now have done more research on dyslexia and know a better way of manipulating my pictures to show this. But I can write backwards almost as fast as I can write forwards, because I have to think about which way letters go regardless. And so, I wrote a page of words backwards about what it was like to have dyslexia. And then I took a self-portrait. And I pasted overlaying copies of those pages of words over my face and made them all in Photoshop. Everything is made magically in Photoshop. And there's three of them, and they get deeper, or they get harder to see my portrait as each one goes by. Because that's how I feel—I feel like I'm drowned out by words and reading when I have to read.

And I think someone was like, "Oh, this must be a comment on," oh, what was it? It was funny. It was like nowhere near what my piece was even supposed to be about. I think it was like, "This must be a comment on the wrongdoings of journalism," or something like that. And I was like, "How did you get that? Are you even reading the words?" Or it was something funny like that. It was not right, but it was fun to hear other people's interpretation of it. The other people got it immediately. They were like, "Oh, this is about having a disability." And I was like, "Yes, you are right! Good job!" (laughs)

But yes, I have more chance to have more feedback in art class, because that's part of art class. I don't like large critiques because they take forever, and I don't have the patience to sit through three hours of other people talking. It's not that I'm not interested in what they're saying, but it's just after the tenth one I'm like, okay, I'm going to go find some butterflies to stare at. Because words stop coming into my brain and being processed, and yeah, I'm just done.

So, what I love that Norman Locks does is that he has us split up into groups of four or five, and then we do individual critiques. We walk around to each person's work and critique their work. I find that critiquing sometimes is harsh—people can be too harsh. But the way he does it it's

more like a suggestion of what you might do, instead of, "Oh, I don't like this. This is bad." He kind of makes sure that people know not to be too rude, or not to be rude when you're doing a critique. Don't say, "I don't like this;" say what you might be able to do to make it better, or make it go the extra step, the extra mile. And then we switch. We switch groups and scramble again. And that tiny little group makes everything a little bit better. I can focus longer.

But in anthropology, it's harder, because it's all papers. And I don't really get much feedback on those. Because at the end of the term papers come around and then you don't get them back. I have had professors, because writing is so hard for me, some professors are super open to letting me just do a podcast or something. And sometimes it's easier for them to even listen to and then give it back to me, and then they give me some comments on that. But generally, in anthropology you don't get very many comments back. Which is a pity, because it would be nice to know what you're doing wrong and what you're not getting wrong.

Vanderscoff: So mostly you get the letter grade.

Melero: Yeah, you get the letter grade and that's it kind of it.

Final Reflections

Vanderscoff: Okay. So, two final questions. One of them is just thinking about what makes UCSC distinct. If you could perhaps reflect on over the arc of your time here, your personal growth and change, what has UCSC done for you as a place to think from? And then, you can connect that to whatever it is that's distinct about UC Santa Cruz today.

Melero: Well, I'm going to reverse that question. So, UC Santa Cruz in my line of work, in what I've done here, the DRC is the most distinctive part about it, because it's so accommodating and helpful. They're bridging that gap between the professors and the DRC. They're trying, the coordinators and the director are trying to bridge that gap. They're trying to help us along with our goal of unifying the campus. I think this program especially has helped me grow because

it's given me a leadership role that is not like anything else I've ever had. I've been a leader. I've taught martial arts classes to little kids and to older kids and to adults. But teaching and leading are two different things, especially in this line of work.

I've definitely grown in minding my speech and thinking about what am I saying that might make someone uncomfortable. For example, using the word "crazy." I try not to use that anymore, because that can make some people not feel comfortable for many different reasons. And you might have many different disabilities.

And what else has it done? I think the university experience, as a whole, has made me become more independent, and I almost want to say louder. It's made me become louder, more vocal in what I believe and the justice that I believe people with disabilities need.

Vanderscoff: Perfect. And then the final question is, when you look forward, what's next for you?

Melero: Oh, man—okay. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: I mean, you know, we don't need the whole life arc. (laughs) But like drawing on your education and your experiences here, some thoughts, then, about what that points to.

Melero: After I walk the stage in June, I'm going on a study abroad trip with Davis for a month. Then I'm traveling around Europe; then I'm coming back. After August 23rd, I have no idea what's going to happen. But I, in the future I see myself teaching or doing the anthropology photography stuff that I talked about earlier—or both. I found that in high school having teachers who had your back and understood and helped you find resources to get into college and to make the best of your high school career, and to pick you up and cheer you on when things were not looking so great for you, makes all the difference in your high school career, which leads into college. I would never, ever want to be an English teacher because I just can't do English, and I'm not good at it, or a math teacher, I would never do that. But I would

love to be an art teacher for high school students and guide students in the way that I've been guided that has worked so well for me. And I know everybody seems to say this, but make a difference in their lives in the best way that I can. So, we'll see. We're not sure where we'll end up. But yeah, we'll see.

Vanderscoff: Great. So, unless there's anything else you'd like to say in closing?

Melero: Thanks for this opportunity. That's really the only thing I can think of.

Vanderscoff: Well, perfect. Thank you so much for being a part of this and for sharing all about your studies and yourself and the incredibly important work that you're doing here on campus.

Louis Odiase

At the time of this interview, Louis Odiase was an economics major at UC Santa Cruz and affiliated with Oakes College, where he was a residential assistant for the Biko House. Odiase comes from a Nigerian family and grew up in the East Bay. He earned a license in real estate before coming to UC Santa Cruz. Odiase is a volunteer for Destination Higher Education, an outreach program which introduces newly admitted students to the Afrikan/Black/Caribbean community and student life on the UC Santa Cruz campus. He has worked as a marketing coordinator for the National Collegiate Athletic Association at UCSC and an events assistant at the Office of Physical Education, Recreation, and Sports.

Vanderscoff: Today is Wednesday, April 12, 2017. And this is Cameron Vanderscoff here for the Student Interviews oral history project at UCSC. So, what we've been doing at the start of these interviews is asking people to introduce themselves in their own words, and then just say a little bit about where they're from. Our main focus here today is on UCSC, but we're also very curious about what people are bringing with them to this place, your family background and educational background.

Early Background

Odiase: My name is Louis Odiase. I'm in Oakes College. I'm an RA for the Biko House. And I'm originally from Antioch, California, which is in the East Bay area, forty minutes north of Oakland. I have a mother and father, three siblings. One older, one's at UCLA. Two younger

ones, both in middle school. I went to Deer Valley High School. It was a predominantly black high school, African American. I've seen the difference between here and the school back at home. Huge difference, huge difference, as in the teachers, the things we actually went over. [In high school] we never talked about anything such as social justice issues, or anything political in that matter.

Vanderscoff: I have two questions here that I want to touch on. So, talking about your family's attitude to college, and then your own decision to go to college, if you could speak about that a little bit. And along the way I'd like to talk about—you started work, you got your [real estate] license from Allstate, I know.

Odiase: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: You're an agent. So, I'd like you to talk about both those things as a way of talking about your own motivation and goals.

Odiase: I see. Well, to be more specific, I'm Nigerian. And my parents, of course, they're Nigerian, too. So, they have this huge motivation for me to go to college. Like a huge standard that I have to go to college. Education is a huge thing in the house. Like straight A's, and everything. If you don't, it's like whoa, who are you, you're not a part of this family. So, I had to be one of the top tiers in the school.

I went from elementary school, which was private, and more secluded [and where] my parents told me everything and I had to really follow their rules; [then] middle school I went more public. But my mom was a teacher there, so I was also watched over by my parents. Then when I got to high school, I had a lot more freedom. And that's when things started [to] change. I started doing my own thing. Academics, it kind of used to slip. But at the same time, I knew I was going to go to college, because I still had average grades to get into college.

So, then I just applied to different universities, got into UC Santa Cruz. It was one of the best schools I got into. It was between UC Santa Cruz, UC Riverside and CSU Fullerton. I thought UC Santa Cruz would be the best fit for me.

Then during the summer, I started working at Allstate with my father. I'm not going to lie, I did not like the job at all. It was really boring. I was sitting at a desk all day waiting for people to come in, answering calls. Not my type of environment. But I remember halfway through, my dad said, "You have to go to school to get an Allstate insurance license if you want to keep on working here." Of course, it was a job. So, I thought, of course.

So that's when I went to my first class. It was about twenty people in the class, an average of thirty years old, forty years old. I was like, what am I doing here? I'm seventeen. And like wow, I'm in a group of adults. I didn't know what to do. They said only about 40 percent of people pass it their first time. You must take a test to pass to become a fully licensed Allstate insurance agent. And I said to my dad, "I don't know, this is something, this is something, something new." But then I started thinking to myself. I thought okay, if I'm going to go into college, I've got to be ready. College is on a whole new level from high school. High school wasn't really that much work. But college. College is going to be on a whole different level. So, I thought if I can possibly do this, then I can definitely be ready for college.

That's when I started studying like crazy for the exam, completing workbooks, reading the textbook. Then when it finally came to the exam, that was the first time I ever experienced test anxiety. I remember I almost blacked out in front of the test. I was looking at the screen like, whoa. But I somehow got through it. Passed the exam easily, actually. And that's when I kind of realized that when I enter college, it's going to be, if I keep on this path, it will be fine, you know? So that's definitely helped me. That's been my biggest motivational factor that's been carrying me through these two years of college so far.

Vanderscoff: So you got that. So, you get your license, but then you come straight to school nonetheless.

Odiase: Mm hmm.

Vanderscoff: So you have this as a motivational factor, but also as an inspirational factor, understanding that you can do that. In that context, you mentioned that you were picking between Santa Cruz and Fullerton, and what was the third place?

Odiase: Riverside.

Vanderscoff: Riverside. So, in that context, how did you first hear about UC Santa Cruz? And then what was it about here that made it seem like it was the place out of those?

Odiase: I was looking through all the UCs, of course. Of course, my top choice was UCLA, because I love the So Cal area. I've been there a few times. Love it. That's still where I'm probably planning to go after college. But the main choice was between UC Santa Cruz and UC Riverside. Because I wanted to go to a UC, mainly because of the name of the UCs.

Destination Higher Education

I think the biggest reason that made me come here was Destination Higher Education [DHE], which is for high school seniors. They bring high school students here, minority students, bring them here, give them a tour around the school for three days. And they show them different things about this campus. And I started seeing like wow, this could possibly be a great place to go. Mainly the people I ran into, they were actually friendly.

Vanderscoff: And so where was your DHE housed? Where was that trip that you took down, was that an overnight thing?

Odiase: It was an overnight thing. We stayed in the Stevenson Lounge. That was not comfortable, but—(laughs) It was not comfortable at all. But it was fun. It was mainly a day that really brought the atmosphere. It was just the people I seen and ran into: they're all friendly. And I thought okay, that seemed like a good place to go.

And also, I couldn't really visit UC Riverside because my dad did not want to take the trip down to So Cal. I had a sure mindset about one, so I thought, let's just go there.

And ever since then, I've actually been volunteering for DHE every year. Last year I was a DHE intern. This year I'm a little too busy, so I couldn't really do that. It's actually happening this weekend. And I'm going to be an overnight chaperone, and the emcee for the dinner.

Vanderscoff: So DHE is a part of what pitches you, then, to come here.

Odiase: Mm hmm.

First Impressions of UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: So something I'm really curious about is, so you show up here day one, week one. What are your first impressions of this place, relative to home, to Antioch?

Odiase: Ah, for one thing, a lot of trees. A lot of trees. A lot of trees. This is definitely, I'm not going to lie, I'm still not the environmental type. Like the hiking environmental—that is definitely not me. That's why So Cal is definitely more my atmosphere. But the people I met, it was easy to make friends. I was actually surprised. It was easy to make friends, which definitely helped out a lot. But I didn't have any bad impressions about it at first. Of course, I wasn't going on any hikes, which most people did, so I kind of had to distance myself from that part. But everything else, I actually liked about this campus. The people I met, the classes I was actually taking, like core, I loved it because of the social justice issues that we were going over.

Vanderscoff: You mentioned that was a contrast then relative to your high school. So, could you talk a little bit more about the Oakes core class that you took, as an introduction to some of those issues?

Odiase: Yeah. During the summer, we had to read this book by Alexander Hamilton, *The New Jim Crow*. I never heard about it before in my life. Basically, it was talking about the mass incarceration system. I never heard about this back in high school. My parents never talked to me about this. I had never heard about this system. I thought people go to jail because they ended up in those situations. And I never used to really know about these different systems that were set in place ever since Ronald Reagan, the War on Drugs. I never really knew about all this. That's what really opened my eyes.

And it not only taught me about racial issues, it taught me about aspects like gender roles. Like say when people refer to a group of girls, their usual thing is, "Hey, you guys," or, they usually just say all guys. Instead of saying, "y'all," "you," "you all." Or you can even say, "you girls." But mostly people just say "you guys." And it's kind of weird because even if there's not a guy in the group, they'll still say, "you guys." So ever since then, I've just been keeping it, "y'all," just to be inclusive of everyone.

And that's why I love this campus. Because I feel like if I would have went to another campus, say like a Cal State, I may not have learned all the social justice issues, or all these things about gender roles and the LGBT community. I don't feel like I would have went into depth about the different perspectives of these groups. Which is exactly why I'm happy about this campus.

Vanderscoff: And so if that education has been important to you, where has that happened? You talk about the Oakes core classes. Is this something that is happening in core class? Is this happening in your education? Is this happening socially? If you think about these different kind of intersectional issues, right, like LGBTQ issues, or the issue of male normativity in referring to a group of people, like guys—

Odiase: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: So where has that education been happening for you? Where have been the important places for that?

Odiase: Like where did I learn it from?

Vanderscoff: Is that class? Is that social?

Odiase: Well, so it started off in the core class. Definitely for that first quarter, it started out in the core class. Where I got the basics: social justice, racial issues, gender roles, all that. And then I'm also in the African-Black Student Alliance and Black Man's Alliance. That is also where I've learned more about racial issues, about all the things that's been happening in the world. Basically, we'll talk a lot about all the different systems that are set in place that are hindering African American students.

Oakes College

And also, my different conversations daily. Because within Oakes, it always starts off as a fun conversation. But somehow always ends up on more of a serious issue, whether that's LGBT community, or that's gender roles, how guys can do this, but girls can't do that. I think the main growth that's happened with me is because of the many conversations that I have every single day within the Oakes community, whether it's at a club, or just talking to a teacher. It's mainly conversation. Not exactly learning from a class. It's just conversations.

Vanderscoff: So we've talked about Oakes a couple of times. I'm curious if you could say a little bit more about your first impressions about Oakes, in particular, and then moving in to live there.

Odiase: So I remember when I first seen Oakes on DHE. I did not think I was going to live there at all. I seen the Oakes, like the Oakes, the actual wood buildings. And I was like whoa,

that is not me. That is not me. I'd rather live in an actual concrete building because I don't know what's inside there, like are there lizards going all across, lizards running across the hallways? (laughter) I do not want lizards waking up next to me. So, I was not working out with Oakes. (laughs)

Then, a friend told me actually Oakes was the most diverse. I thought oh, that definitely helps out a lot. Because I wanted to see people that were just like me, other minority students. Because the African American population on this campus, I think is around 2 to 3 percent, I'm most likely not going to see a lot of African American students around campus. So, I thought, why not be in a place where maybe more of them are and other minority students? And it was extremely diverse: African American, Hispanic, Asian, white. I even met a few Native Americans.

But when I actually finally came to the campus that's exactly what I seen, and that was comforting. It was definitely comforting. I wasn't really sure what to expect when I came to this campus because a lot of people were saying okay, this campus is predominantly white, which it is. I didn't know exactly what to expect when coming to this campus. But when I finally seen that there was a place for minority students, I was like, that's beautiful. I've always loved Oakes because of that reason.

Vanderscoff: If you take those early weeks or months of being here, what was the difference for you in terms of being in that community in Oakes, and then being in the wider campus?

Odiase: (laughs) I don't know, I do feel like Oakes has its little family. I do feel like it has a little family; we have our little small community. Because like a lot of people don't come to Oakes. It's on the outskirts of campus. So, if you do want to go to Oakes, you usually have a reason. Either you have a class, or you're trying to get to the west remote parking lot. That's what most people come to Oakes for. So that's why we have our little community.

When I come to the outer campus, it's not like I have a problem. For some reason, I make friends easily. I have no problem with any race. I make friends regardless. If you're a cool person, you're fine. But it's just comforting to know there are people like you. And then when you come to the outer campus, it's fine because you already know you have your community back at home. So, you don't really feel as much as a minority when you go to the rest of campus. You know, you're still comforted. And then the people even around campus are fine. They're still friendly. I've met a lot of people that are extremely friendly, regardless of whether they were white, Asian, black. It doesn't really matter. So that's why this campus is really comforting.

Vanderscoff: Well, yeah. So, it's interesting that another thing that you mentioned is that you don't much like hiking. But, of course, being on this campus, you kind of—

Odiase: Have to.

Vanderscoff: —hike to class. You hiked here. (laughter)

Odiase: Yeah, that's a mission. It's a mission.

Early Academic Experiences

Vanderscoff: So I'd like to loop back to a couple of these different themes later on. But something I'd like to get at, then, is talking about your early academic experiences, adjusting from whatever type of student you'd been in high school to your early classes here. We can start with GEs, and then start pointing towards your major.

Odiase: Okay. So back in high school, I definitely did not care as much. I definitely did not. If I had homework, I'd probably do it the day before. Late at night, try to get it out of the way. Just get it in. And my high school wasn't really a top high school, so you didn't really have to do much work to get by or do well. So, I feel like that would have been a disadvantage if I'm going

into college. But like I said, the Allstate thing definitely did help out because gave me a whole new motivation. I knew this is the type [of work] I needed to do to actually succeed in college.

So, I remember I went to this thing. I'm not sure if you know what Justice is. Basically, it's kind of like DHE on steroids. It's a week program where you come to UCSC during the summer. It's kind of like a simulation, a school simulation. You learn about social justice issues. You have homework to do. You write essays. And I remember feeling like okay, this is the time, this is the time to really show myself that I can do this college thing. This is when I knew I was different because right when I got my first homework assignment, I went straight home, and did it. I just did it. And I remember all the other Justice participants, they were doing their own thing. I remember they went to go hike. I already knew that wasn't my thing, so like, you all can do your thing. (laughs) You do your thing. But I remember doing my homework right when I get it. That was my biggest thing that I preached to my residents in my house. I do my homework right when I get it. That way, I have more free time after. I've been doing that ever since. But throughout the whole week I thought to myself that this was pretty easy.

[My first quarter] I took this class, *Muppet Magic*. That was a class. That was a class. I finally see those college weird GEs. It wasn't that bad. But that was one of the instances when I did essays right when I got it. I used to email my TA about it, send the essay in as soon as possible. I didn't have anything else to do so I might as well email my TA, get the results back, revise it, and get a better grade. Many things I started to do over here really accelerated, really helped my studies and my GPA.

But I remember my first quarter, I remember I took Math 3. I had an extremely hard professor. Extremely hard professor. I was mad because I got a B plus. Other people would be like, beautiful. I think that's the whole Nigerian aspect, my parents in me. 'Like, oh, you've got to have straight As, da, da, da. So that's definitely helped. So, I just kept on the cycle.

The next quarter I started taking my major courses. I took Econ 1. I'm a business management economics major. I took Econ 1, I actually fell in love with it automatically, so that's how I already knew that was for me. That was the first quarter I got a 4.0. I had Econ 1. I remember I also took another weirder class, I think environmental art. And, oh, *Personal Computers*. That was an extremely easy class, an extremely easy class. Then third quarter was my hardest quarter that year. I took Econ 2, AMS 11A, which is *Calculus for Econ*. And then Writing 2. That was the quarter that really was like, if I do good in this quarter, I got this. Like I really got this.

And I also had two jobs. I was working for OPERS as an event staff assistant, and as an intramural official. So, I knew if I could do it this quarter with all this on me, I could get by. I went to every section. It definitely helped out. Section, went to every single class, and got a 4.0 that quarter, too. That's just been happening since. I'm glad. I think it's really the Allstate thing, by getting my license and then getting my motivation that if I just keep on doing this, I'll be fine during my time in college, and that's what's been happening. So that's definitely helped me out.

Vanderscoff: And so, I'm wondering if you could say a little bit more about some of these early classes that you took, and then a class that was maybe a GE, like *Muppet Magic* or *Personal Computers*, which I also took. (laughter)

Odiase: I see.

Vanderscoff: And then, the classes that ultimately led you towards your major. I mean, how were you relating to these classes in different ways? Like some of these maybe more outline classes, and then classes where you sensed, oh, this is a core interest for me. Tell me more about how that emerges, and you get on the path that you're on now.

Odiase: *Muppet Magic*, I was looking at classes, for an extra class. At first, I seen *Muppet Magic*. I was like, whoa, like is that really about Muppets? (laughs) This could be like a joke. It must be a joke. So, I looked at the professor. She seemed like she was really cool. Like should be an easy

A. I was like okay, let me go into this class. Within the first two weeks, I already knew this is not my field. Definitely not an art major, theater major, definitely could not do this. The essays were not interesting to me. At the end, though, the class was actually fun. We actually had to do a project. You could make your own puppet, or you could do a video or a play. So, I did a music video to Akon "Lonely." I remember I had to go back Thanksgiving break. I had to have my high school friends come in and help me. They're like, "This is what they're having you do at Santa Cruz?" "Yes, yes. (laughter) This is Santa Cruz." But it was a cool class. It was a cool class. But I realized it was not what I was going to do in the future.

Personal Computers, that was also an extremely easy class. That was the one class I did not end up going to. That was the one class. Because it was really easy. But I don't have an interest in computers like that.

When I took Econ 1, that was when I actually started seeing the different concepts and was able to relate it to society. K.C. Fung**,** who was the professor, was a really good professor to me. And he was funny and knew how to teach the subjects. That's when I realized this could actually work. This could actually work as a future thing.

And then I took Econ 2 with Ajay Shenoy**.** Probably one of the best professors I had. He taught me how to relate it to society, how economists make their decisions. This is really interesting to me. I want to go into marketing, which has nothing really to do with econ, exactly. You can relate it in some aspects, but not as much. But ever since then, I have actually been able to relate to it, so that's what's making it even more interesting. Since we don't really have a marketing emphasis on this campus, just one class, which kind of sucks. So, I have to do my own online research for marketing courses.

Vanderscoff: And there's no communications, either.

Odiase: No, no. So that does really suck in that aspect. That's why sometimes I feel like a Cal State would have been better. But at the same time, like I said, there's a lot of other reasons that made this campus perfect. So, I just do my own marketing research on the outside. But when I take these econ classes, I relate to it so well. I'm not even worried about whether it's about marketing or not, because the classes are extremely interesting to me. I took Econ 100A last quarter, which is *Intermediate Micro*. I'm taking Econ 100B right now. They're both extremely fun classes to me. So that's definitely helped out when I was picking my major. It was like a no-brainer.

Majoring in Economics

Vanderscoff: So maybe you could say a little bit more about what it is that sparks you, or interests you about economics, and relating it to some of the coursework you've done here, given that you're planning on going not directly into economics as such, but into marketing.

Odiase: Yeah. I don't know. I think for one thing, it does come easy to me. So that definitely helps. It's not like I'm going to go from this to biology. Definitely cannot do that, cannot do that. But I think it's the fact that—you can see it like in everyday life. I think that's the reason I like it. Because you can look at different economies, and say they're doing this and this. Like they're operating, say, as a monopolistic company, or whether they're in perfect competition, and you see like the different things they do, which makes sense why they do it. It actually makes sense why they do it now. Instead of just seeing that they're making these choices and it didn't really make sense before. I think that's really the main thing that really interests me in econ. It's so applicable to everyday life. You could apply a lot of other majors to everyday life. But with econ, I think it's just because I love money, too. So that's definitely huge. Love money. Or anything that has to do with money and seeing the way money works, this was a huge factor in me picking the econ major. And I loved it in high school. So that's why I just went straight into it.

Vanderscoff: You love having money, or you love studying money? (laughs)

Odiase: Both, both. (laughs) Both, definitely—yeah, definitely both. So that's been like a huge thing.

Vanderscoff: And then, you can correct me if I'm wrong here, but it would seem to me that perhaps one linkage to, that gets closer to marketing, is the fact that you're studying business economics, as opposed to, you know, econometrics or something that's kind of deep into economics. So, are there any linkages that emerge there? If you're interested in marketing, you're interested in business, what about that side of your education, that business orientation of your courses?

Odiase: I have not got into those yet. Right now, I've only been able to take the econ classes, so I can get to the business classes. So, this should be my last quarter. I'm taking econ, intermediate macro and then I'm taking econometrics. And then once I'm done with that, then I can go into the business classes, which I'll be taking next year. I should be taking marketing, business strategy, e-commerce—all these classes that actually do have to do with marketing, which will definitely help me out a lot. But until then, can't really speak on behalf of the business courses here. But I'm really looking forward to those. I'm just waiting for this quarter to be over, then I can finally go into things I really want to study in the future.

Grading and Evaluation

Vanderscoff: That's great. So, another thing we've been asking various students—traditionally at UCSC they offered narrative evaluations for classes that you're in, in addition to grades. So, the question then is whether you've had any narrative evaluations in any of your classes now—they're optional now, I understand—and then also talking about what you've learned from the way in which you've been graded or reviewed.

Odiase: What do you mean? When you say narrative evaluations, what exactly do you mean?

Vanderscoff: So when I was here, they still had them, but they've changed that since. The professor essentially would write up a narrative paragraph about you and your work at the end of the quarter, just kind of summing it up, for good or for bad.

Odiase: I see.

Vanderscoff: And then they'd post it to your MyUCSC, basically. It's optional now. And we're curious whether anyone still has that as a part of their academic experience?

Odiase: Oh, I see.

Vanderscoff: And then regardless of whether they have that, just talking about how you feel about the kind of assessment that you're getting from your professors.

Odiase: Are these specifically for econ?

Vanderscoff: It was campus-wide.

Odiase: Campus-wide.

Vanderscoff: It was campus-wide.

Odiase: Okay. I have not seen the narrative evaluations. I've not seen them. I've never actually heard of them. So maybe I haven't run into the right professor that's done it yet.

As in grading-wise, I feel that it's been fair. I feel like it's, especially with the econ classes, kind of more of a weed out. Because if you do the work and you put in the time and effort, you're going to do fine in the class. If you don't, and think it's going to be just an easy skate by, of course it's not going to be. So, I feel that the evaluation that the professors do give is usually fair. Of course, it's sometimes where the professor may grade extremely hard. That does suck. But usually with enough complaints, that usually does change for the next midterm. Like that happened a while ago.

Vanderscoff: In terms of you mean students—

Odiase: Yes, students complaining.

Vanderscoff: About the difficulty of a grading?

Odiase: Yes. It actually does change. So that's why I actually like that, too, because the professor actually takes that into account, how the students are feeling, and then may revise their rubric based on how the students are feeling they're being assessed. Which is definitely a good thing about professors. I didn't really know professors would do that. I thought usually there would be okay: "This is how I grade. If you don't like it, change majors." But that's actually been fine so far. So, the assessment has been fair so far.

Online Learning

Vanderscoff: And then another question here is the role of online learning keeps kind of changing as far as its role in education. And so, one of the questions of this project is asking about what sort of role that plays in terms of your coursework.

Odiase: You said online?

Vanderscoff: Exactly. I mean online components to learning and that sort of thing. Because you know, it seems normal to us. But if you look at this as like a historical thing, that wasn't happening twenty years ago.

Odiase: I see. True, true. So, one thing that I've used a lot has been either eCommons, which is where our professors use to go and put their online resources, say readings or practice tests or mandatory tests, which is definitely new. Definitely new. I hadn't used that in high school; we definitely didn't used to use online anything. It's mainly like worksheets, turn them in, great. You know? But it's fine. The only problem that I don't like about the online aspects, [is] when you have to pay to use an online resource. Like say either like my accounting lab, my math lab,

my econ lab, all those things. But I understand why professors do it because it's a huge lecture hall and it takes time to grade a lot of assignments. So, I definitely understand why they do it that way. I don't really see a problem with it, just as long as the rubric in the online homework websites follows the test or the exam that they give out. Because sometimes they don't and it's like, what exactly am I studying here?

MyUCSC—the main thing I use it for is to check my portal, like financial aid. Or check my student center, to enroll in classes, or to check my advising reports to see how many more credits I need, or different things like that. That's the main thing I use MyUCSC for.

Sports at UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: Yeah. That's useful to have on. So, is there anything else you'd like to say about your major before we move on to talk about some of your community involvement?

Odiase: I think my major is summed up, pretty much.

Vanderscoff: Great. So, then I'd like to talk about your extracurricular involvement under this theme of college and advocacy and activist involvement. I know you've done a bunch of different things. So, I thought we could start on the campus-wide level, and then we'll focus in on Oakes. I know you've been doing a lot of advocacy for sports on campus as the marketing coordinator for the NCAA. And so, I'm wondering if you could talk about that particular job, and then talking about sports, which is an often a sort of downplayed part of campus.

Odiase: It definitely is, definitely is.

Vanderscoff: So I'm curious to hear you talk about how you got that job, and then a bit about you and sports, too.

Odiase: Yeah, as I said earlier, I was an events staff assistant at OPERS last year, working with Marcus Wirth. So, I used to help out at events. Help set up, clean up, maintain events. I was

helping with a soccer event, and the associate athletic director, Collin Pregliasco came up to me, and we were talking for a bit. And he talked to me about my major, what I wanted to do. I was saying I'm a business management economics major pursuing marketing, probably sports, consumer goods, fashion, around there. And he said, "Oh, that sounds interesting because I might be thinking about setting up this new job, which is basically you'd do marketing for the athletics on campus." Oh, that sounds amazing because that would be perfect experience, for me to learn how to do marketing.

So, we've been in contact ever since then. And then at the start of this year, that's when I started. Basically, just had a few meetings. Talked about what we need to do. Because you know how the sports is on campus. It's basically nonexistent, you know?

Vanderscoff: If you could say a little about what your perception is of the place of sports on campus, just for the record.

Odiase: Oh, yes. The sports on campus is definitely nonexistent. I'm not going to lie about that. That's one of the reasons I really was excited to take the job. Because most people don't even know we have sports on campus. You know, we're a D3 school. So usually whenever I've been to a girls' basketball game, there's probably like twenty people in the crowd. A men's basketball game, it's even less. Probably the biggest sport on campus is the men's volleyball team, because I think they're number two or number four in the nation, it's one of the two, for D3. But even then, they don't even have a full crowd when they play. And I feel there's no reason for that to be, because a lot of people want a sports presence, but just don't want to make the effort to go. And they usually say because they didn't know when there's a game happening. Okay. Okay. So, somebody should change that. And that's perfect, because that's exactly what Collin came up to me about.

So, I started the job in September of last year. And that's where I came up with the idea of Battle of the Colleges. It's basically a campus-wide event. At certain sports events throughout the year,

fans can come to the event and can earn points for their college. You get one set of points for attendance, one set of points for how interactive and loud you are during the game, and then one set of points for a halftime contest.

The first game, it was a women's volleyball game. And they usually pull, on average, around sixty people per game. So, it was only me working on that one, for that certain game, because it was a new concept. Nobody knew exactly how this would work out, whether we should add more people onto the marketing team. So, it was just me for that. I had to do the marketing, the advertising. I even made a video, with the help of my friend Alexis Meraz, that's on my Facebook. I don't know if you've seen it.

Vanderscoff: Yeah.

Odiase: Made a video—it actually kind of got pretty big for a little. And learned how to do funding requests, to get funding for the event. And so, it came to the event. And I remember, for the first few minutes before, I was like oh my god, is this going to work? Because only half the crowd was filled. And then within like ten minutes, people came in. It was in the West Field House, so you couldn't really hold that many people. But at the end of the night, I remember my boss did a count and he said there were about 341 people there not counting staff. And that was huge. Because it was the perfect audience. It was a beautiful sports presence. So ever since then I'm like, this marketing thing, it's fun and I may have a knack for this.

Vanderscoff: So I'm curious, so that's a huge spike in attendance. So, what exactly were your strategies? I know that you made a video. But can you tell a little bit more about how you used either your networks or other campus networks to get that turnout?

Odiase: The reason, the way I came up with the Battle of the Colleges was because I was an RA. The idea evolved over time. First, I just wanted a way to be able to reach out to other colleges and reach out to the freshmen in those colleges. And so, I could email the CRE, and

then the CRE will email the RAs, and the RAs will email the freshmen. And actually, over time, I thought okay, why not make this into a competition. Since I'm going to reach out to these many people, let's give them some type of incentive to go to the game. And that's where the incentive to battle for your college actually came about. So that's exactly how I used my RA network to reach out to all these people. And that's when I started sending out emails to multiple people. And that's when I started working with the SAAC Committee, the Sports Athletic Advisory Committee. They also helped me go through dining halls, the day before, the day of the game, and would shout out, hold signs up, say like, "Game today, game tomorrow! Come to the West Field House!" That definitely helped out, too. So, the connections that I made through that, they've definitely helped out with the marketing strategy that I was utilizing.

Vanderscoff: And so you talked about this point system, if you showed up. So how were you keeping track of this? How were you awarding points?

Odiase: It was basically kind of like, I don't want to say it was prehistoric, but it was just put a tally, where a person come in, show ID, tally. Come in, tally. And then, so basically you just had to do that for the attendance system. And then for the loudness competition, we wouldn't exactly see which college [was loudest], of course, during the game. So, during the time outs we'd go around, say like, "Okay, let's hear Cowell! Let's hear Oakes!"

Vanderscoff: (laughter) Who won?

Odiase: For the loudness competition, it was actually Rachel Carson, Rachel Carson College. Because they actually had the most people, since they live right next to the West Field House. They had the most people. So, they had about 100 people before the first quarter. So, they won that; they won that competition. They were the loudest. They really got into how loud they were. And then during the halftime we did this competition. It was like a volleyball throw-in. It was twenty people, two from each college. And basically, you just hit a ball, and someone has to catch it. See how many you can catch within a minute. And so, we just did that, see who won.

I'm not sure exactly who won that one. I want to say Kresge? I'm not sure. But that's exactly what got people to the game. And then, thank God, the women's team won that one, which made it even more huge. So that was how I went about doing the competitions.

Vanderscoff: And so the Battle of the Colleges, then, that's multiple events?

Odiase: Mm hmm.

Vanderscoff: So then walk me through the arc of a Battle of the Colleges.

Odiase: So after that, we had a woman's basketball game. And this one was definitely a harder game. Because for one, it was off campus.

Vanderscoff: At—

Odiase: The Kaiser Permanente Arena. And also, because what we did for the first game, we made it free. So that was huge. We made it free for everybody to go. So, they all came. But for the women's basketball game, we couldn't make it free. Because of some, I guess, some legal issues around it. We thought it was going to be three dollars but I guess there was some bad communication on somebody's part. And tickets were actually six dollars. Exactly. So basically, what I heard was, because I was in the game, like kind of running the event. And there was some people coming in and then I'm seeing a lot of people outside. And I'm thinking, why are all these people outside? And they said, "The price is six dollars." I'm like, "No it was supposed to be three." So, I guess there was a bad communication on our part. I'm not exactly sure who, because I know at the cashier arena, they've always said six dollars. So, I guess there was a bad communication on our part. I'm not exactly sure who was communicating with them. So, a lot of people actually did leave because it was six dollars. Because they didn't expect it, I guess they didn't want to pay, I understand. Because our school's not popular enough to say like six dollars, I guess, for an event. Because there's no sports presence at all. So, we expected to build it up, at least, first. So that definitely was kind of a hindrance.

But over time, throughout the next quarter, that's when the Sports Athletic Advisory Committee came in. That's when they stepped in full force. And that's when I started falling back too. Because I started having more responsibilities as an RA. And my classes started getting harder. And that's when we also had new management. Because Colin Pregliasco, the associate athletic director, took another job. So we had new management. And so, we started going in different directions, which was actually for the best. Like the marketing, I learned a lot more about marketing from the person. One of them was Damien Jepson. Another is Paul Simpson. He was a UCSC alumni back in 2002. Came back to do the Save Athletics campaign. And I learned a lot more about marketing from seeing what they did, how they implemented different things.

And it definitely helped. The attendance started going up again at men's basketball games, women's basketball games. Because the average over there was a lot lower, say like around twenties, thirties, forties.

Vanderscoff: Those games are downtown?

Odiase: Those were downtown, because nobody wants to make the trip, nobody wants to pay. So, they started doing theme nights. By doing theme nights, they could even lower the price. 'Paul Simpson made a deal with the Kaiser Arena people, and said okay, if we do this and this, we can possibly lower the price. Which we did. And so that increased the attendance to 100, 200, 300. And so that's exactly when the last one actually ended the last quarter. I think it was around three to four hundred people for the last one. It was a huge increase from forty. That's a huge increase. So that's exactly when I started realizing, marketing could be a huge asset, if you learn how to do it.

And then this quarter, I actually had to slowly transition out of the position. Because I still have the RA position. I'm taking 22 units. And also, the SAAC Committee, [is now there] in full force, I was really doing the job mainly because there's nobody there for athletics. But since they have

about 300 people within their committee [now], there was not really enough space [for me]. So, I was like okay, let me just back up. And let me just focus on academics. And yeah, that's how it's been since then.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, I noticed at the end, some of the events had very Santa Cruz themes, like Grateful Dead. (laughs)

Odiase: Yeah, Grateful Dead.

Vanderscoff: But then also, I mean, there was a tuition award—

Odiase: Yes, yes.

Vanderscoff: —at the last game, a quite substantial one at that. Maybe you could say a little bit about that.

Odiase: Yeah. I was actually surprised. Because I remember back during the first quarter, me and Colin really wanted to do a huge prize like that. Do like kind of a competition, or a half-court shot for say a ten-thousand-dollar award. Because what you had to do for that is you would have to sign up with this company. It's kind of like an insurance policy, pay five hundred and then they would come orchestrate the event.

Paul Simpson was actually the one that worked, I guess with the chancellor. And they worked out a deal as to where a person could actually do the tuition shot. Which was amazing. I mean, nobody really came close—

Vanderscoff: It was a half-court shot?

Odiase: It was actually a four-shot parlay. You had to do a layup, free throw, a three-pointer and a half-court, all within thirty seconds. And then also, to make it even harder, it was nobody

that could have played basketball at a college or high school varsity level within the last four or five years. So that made it extremely hard. (laughter)

Vanderscoff: Yeah, right.

Odiase: So it was kind of there for show, mainly. But it was a definitely good idea. And if somebody did win it, that would have been huge.

Vanderscoff: So you've mentioned being an RA several times, and that's something I'd like to go into as well.

Odiase: Okay.

Vanderscoff: One last question about athletics before we go there. I just picked up a copy of *City on the Hill Press* the other day, and they were talking about having a student fee being assessed to support the presence of NCAA sports on campus. And if it doesn't go through, that actually would be very negative [for sports]. So, I'm curious, from your experience doing the sports marketing position, about your take on that initiative, and then your thoughts on development of sports as a student and on campus.

Odiase: Truly for me, I'm definitely all for sports. I'm all for sports. I do feel like it is kind of weird to have a UC campus without sports. I think we're the only one that's actually a D3. Because Merced is just, I think, moving up to an NAIA, I'm not sure. Yeah, so it's always been really weird. When I first came here, I was really looking forward to sports. And then I heard nobody talk about it. I was like whoa, this is kind of strange. An opinion poll passed the last year. Basically, they were talking about increasing it to ninety dollars, the student fee for athletics. And I was for it, but a lot of people weren't. But since it was an opinion poll, they didn't really care, so they said, "Let's just do it."

But now that they're talking about increasing it again, this is the real thing. And that's one of the reasons we were doing this whole sports marketing thing, so that we would get people actually interested in athletics so they'd be wanting to do it. So hopefully that's what happens, because I know me and Paul Simpson and Damien Jepson and Colin and Marcus have all been putting in an extreme amount of work to make sure that this campus does keep sports. Because that's a huge part of a campus, regardless. And if it was to go away, that's kind of like taking a part of the campus, regardless of whether it's a small part or a big part, taking a part away from the campus. So hopefully it does pass in May.

Residential Assistant at Oakes College

Vanderscoff: Great. So then moving to something you've alluded to several times, which is the RA position. So, let's focus, then, on your Oakes involvement.

Odiase: Okay.

Vanderscoff: So if you could just talk about your motivation, whatever that might be, about getting the RA position, and then the story of getting that and then the job.

Odiase: I actually wanted to be an RA. I didn't really know what an RA was before college. So, I came in. And one of my good friends was actually an RA. I thought oh, that's really cool, just being that top figure that mentors students. They can come to you for questions. And I thought that sounds really cool. I was thinking about doing it. I didn't even know at that time that you get free room and board. That wasn't even like in my mind. I thought it was cool that you can live in a house with freshmen, they can come to you for questions, like have a cool community within the house. And then I found out you had free room and board. It was a no brainer. That's what gave me the motivation. I really want to be that mentor figure, that role model that a freshman can look up to, to see, okay, that's how you do this or do this. And that's why I like to [offer] study tips, like finish your homework right after class. I have a flier for that posted on

every floor. I talk to residents about their academics all the time. That's one of the things I stress within the house. Because if you don't do well with academics, you're not going to stay in here for long.

To get the job, I had to do an essay, get references. I was like okay, this is fine. I found my core teacher and I asked my RA to give me a recommendation. He was glad to. Then we came for the group interview. Me and interviews, like even this, it's like me and interviews, I've always felt a little weird about them. A little weird about them. But at the group interview, basically, it was pretty much doing different team activities to see how you work in a group. Everybody moves on to the interview process, the actual one-on-one. During the interview, I was able to make them laugh. I was like, yes, there you go. If I can make them laugh, maybe I can do this. And then I see two weeks later that the results got in. That's like the RA process of how I got the job.

Vanderscoff: I was an RA when I was here, and there's a couple different areas of the job. So, there's the policy aspect.

Odiase: Yes, yes.

Vanderscoff: Then there's the programming aspect. Then there's sort of a community health aspect, you might say. Which is everything from like academics, like academic health, to things like mental health or physical health.

Odiase: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: So I'm curious then, for you, then, in this community leadership role, what have you been told is the ideal way to do the job, as to what's important. And then what has been your own approach to the job—you know what I mean?

Odiase: I see. I see.

Vanderscoff: I understand that you're in the job, and—(laughter)

Odiase: Yes, yes. Okay, don't want to get fired. (laughter) No, but to be honest, of course I came in with the stigma. The stigma about being an RA is like, they're like the dorm police. And I hate that stigma because it makes people not want to open up to the RAs. You know? And that was really the biggest thing. I was thinking, do I have to really be this dorm police? Because nobody wants the police in their house, you know? So that's when I started realizing, with going through the training and talking to other RAs, which is like the hugest thing, talking to other RAs and seeing what they did. And how they didn't act like the police. It was just, we have things to follow. And if you establish that, they're most likely not going to break it.

That was kind of the approach I took to it. So, when I first started out, I remember I was really scared for my block meeting, like when they were all looking at me, like this is the first thing you see, this is the first impression. I remember I started off with a joke and they laughed. It's like oh, it's over, it's good. If they didn't laugh, I probably would have been scared for the rest of the year. (laughs) But ever since then, I've had this great relationship.

Basically, it's like, "I understand. You're freshmen. And you come with this [idea] to the college that you want to do these things, these things and these things. But you have to realize that you're also part of this campus and you're an adult now. So, you have choices to make. You have choices, so these actions come with consequences. So, it's basically like coming from a freshman that may or may not have been doing whatever you've been doing, you know. (laughs) I understand it's a struggle. I understand the struggle. One of the main things is safety. It's like my biggest thing. "I understand that most of you all may end up doing it. And main thing is that you have to be safe about it." Because there's a lot of things out there that could, say at parties if you're a girl, you never know how these guys are going to act around you. Especially when they get a little alcohol or something 'like that, they might try to hurt you in some way. So, the main thing is being safe.

When it comes to marijuana, for one resident, it was his first time actually smoking. And he actually didn't know what was happening to him. His roommate called me and said he was having an asthma attack. I came over there and he was just throwing up a lot. So, I had to call 911. They came over. They looked at him and they're like, "He's high." And he's like, oh. So, yeah. That was like a lot of residents, they don't know. (laughs) They don't know. So that's what it's like. So that's the safety aspect.

So, the main thing is, if you are doing it in the building, of course you're going to get caught. Like regardless, you're going to get caught. The smartest thing is if you're going to do it, at least do it off campus and do it with people that you at least know will keep you safe. That's the biggest thing I stress within the house.

I have this kind of relationship because they know I'm just another college student like them. And that's exactly why we have such a close relationship within the house.

Vanderscoff: And so one of the things you mentioned there was speaking with residents about the danger of, essentially, you're alluding to sexual harassment and assault, right?

Odiase: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: So I'm curious then about what sort of training you've had in that regard, and then, your own social observations as to that scene. So, when you're giving this advice to new residents, is that coming from a place that this is something that you've observed in terms of this campus? And what's that that dark side, you know what I mean, of the social life here?

Odiase: To talk about the training, we have a lot of Title IX, Title IX training basically talking about sexual assault. What would happen in that case, say if a resident were to come to you? We're a mandatory reporter. So basically, we can say that this happened. But we don't have to disclose who the victim was. But have to disclose the person that did the actual assault. And I

have not, thank God, I have not had any resident come to me about that issue. That's great. That's great.

But the reason I do stress that, is because I'm also talking from a place of observation. I remember one of my close friends came during the first quarter, and they told me, "I've been sexually assaulted." And she wouldn't disclose the name because she knew I was a mandatory reporter. But that's a thing that's really traumatizing. She wouldn't share what exactly happened. She was extremely drunk. And the guy, I guess, just took advantage of her. She just remembered different parts of the night. That's horrible. That's something that will stick with you for a while.

And also, I remember I was at this little get together and I seen this person, she was extremely drunk. And this guy kept on coming over to her, coming up to try to dance with her. And I remember I seen it the first time, like whoa, whoa. I remember I told one of my friends, I said, "Hey, do you see that?" And she was like, "Oh my God!" So, she took her away. And then he went again. And the same friend said, "Get away from her. She's clearly drunk and you're trying to take advantage." And then, I remember she went away again. And then he tried to come back again. And I stepped in that time. I was like, "Whoa, buddy, you've got a problem. Like you've really got a problem." That's scary for anybody watching that, especially to the girl. She probably didn't realize what she was doing because she was extremely drunk. And she probably assumed she either had the energy to pull away, tell him no, move away. And that's extremely uncomfortable for any person. And that's why I don't want anybody to be in that situation. That's why I stress to my residents, "Okay, when it comes to alcohol, weed, or any type of drug or substance, be careful. Because you don't want to be in a state where you can't even protect yourself." That's the main thing.

Vanderscoff: Well, because when I came in as a freshman, I recall that we had to go to a mandatory training on sexual harassment and assault and awareness of some of that. My own

impression as a student was that then as far as social spaces that I was in, there were some spaces that were very conscious about that, and conscious about bystander intervention, which is the sort of thing you were talking about, essentially, and then there were other spaces where I felt that was less the case, where people didn't seem to have had those conversations in the same way. And so, I was just curious about your thought about that. What sort of conversation is amongst students? I think we often talk about this in terms of the person who might be harassed or assaulted, but I think there's also this question of what conversation is going in general, regardless of whether you've had that experience, you know. And what is that conversation—men can be victims of this as well as perpetrators of it. But what's the conversation among the masculine sort of culture?

Odiase: I see, I see. Usually the subject does not come up, because that is a very touchy subject. That is a very touchy subject. But I can tell you it's definitely a lot different than it was back home. People back home are a lot more ignorant. You know, like myself, I was really ignorant coming to this school. Which is why I said I love this campus—it exposed me to all these different things. But a lot of people, they're like more masculine. I'm not exactly sure how to say it exactly. More like they don't—ah, wow, this is a question.

Vanderscoff: It is, it is—so, tell me if this is correct. So, are you saying that this isn't something they discuss or have a consciousness about? Or are you saying that like there's a tendency towards sexual harassment, or something like that?

Odiase: No, no.

Vanderscoff: Or are you saying there's not conversation or consciousness about that?

Odiase: Yeah, I feel like that's more— Because it's not like oh, yeah, we're definitely going to sexually harass. You just wouldn't bring it up. And if you were to bring it up, it's something like, "Oh, that's not happening. That's not going to happen," or something like that. Or they

would feel like they would never be in that situation. And who knows? I'm not sure. They don't realize how things usually happen. Like as a bystander, most people would feel like oh, somebody else would do it, something like that. But that conversation usually doesn't come up. And usually whenever it comes up, it's usually in more of a sanctioned environment. So, it's meant to come up, like say a Title IX issue. Or say we're talking about it to residents or within a lecture hall, like you said, at the beginning of the year. But usually when it comes outside of that, it's kind of a known thing. It's like yeah, if something were to happen like that, you definitely got to intervene in some way. It's not like you can just let that happen, or something like that. So that's the difference, I felt.

Vanderscoff: So it's interesting that you then compare that to your high school experience. I'm interested in how that consciousness develops at UCSC, thinking about this as a place for raising awareness and raising consciousness about a lot of different issues. But that being one of them, with this sort of training especially that you went through as an RA, and I remember going through as an RA as well.

Odiase: Yeah. For me developing it, it was mainly through the training. It was mainly through the trainings. And the first week of school, when we went to that mandatory training, that was really the first time I really seen all this about sexual harassment or things that happen at parties, or alcohol. Like even the alcohol.edu that we had to do, the mandatory online seminar that we have to do. We never used to learn about this in high school. I guess you're supposed to know not to do that, but we never really brought it up. So how would you know how everybody else is feeling about this? So that's what I like about this campus, that we're always bringing it up, whether it's a Title IX from RA trainings, or from a mandatory work seminar that we have to do. Talking from a guy to a guy, usually it does not come up. But usually when I'm talking to someone of the female gender, it does. It does, and that's totally different, because they may have their own experiences. I'm like oh, that's crazy—that's something that we wouldn't have to worry about, but something they would have to worry about. And that's

when you see the female perspective and it's saddening to hear. I learned a lot about female's perspectives on the whole party scene or sexual harassment from other women. And that's where I get a lot of my information from, too.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, so I guess this is all under the rubric of community health. And so then maybe you could say a little bit more, if you would, about being an RA and your experiences trying to support and be a resource for a healthy community. If you can think about ways that that's played out in your work. And that could be in policy-related situations; that could be in health-related situations, or that could be in programming.

Odiase: Yeah. I try to build a community in a lot of different ways. I know some RAs that don't even talk to their residents. More like say hi, bye type of thing, like, I've got to go. One thing I knew is if I'm going to be in this position, I want to make everybody feel comfortable in this house. If they don't feel that comfortable because they're away from home, or something like that, I want to make them feel as comfortable as they can. So, whenever I see one of the residents, I'm like, "Hi, how are you doing? What class are you taking? How have they been? Anything new? How was the weekend?" Just to get them talking. Because of course some are still going to be like hi, and then try to walk past you as fast as they can. It comes with the job. It comes with the job. I'm not going to take offense. You may not be in a good mood. Maybe they don't want to talk to me. I'm not going to take it personally. Some people are just like that. But when I can, I definitely try to talk to all my residents. And I feel like that's helped me. In the resident feedback surveys we got last quarter, a lot of my residents say "Very approachable." I'm like, yes, that's perfect. Because I want them to feel like there's at least one person in the house that they can come and talk to.

Also, we try to encourage an open door policy. I'll keep my door open. So that way when residents are walking by, they can say, "What's up?" to different residents, or so they can meet new people. Say what's up to me. If they need help with anything, perfect.

And programs—whenever we do programs, we try to do programs that will get them talking. Get them talking to each other. The first event that I actually did myself was on the first day of school. It was called S'mores Night Glow Night. And it was to mainly get freshmen over the jitters. Because the first day, you don't know anybody. So, I'm just trying to have a nice little event for people to eat some s'mores, talk, dance with some glow sticks. It was a great event. Because right after the block meeting, a lot of people went to the upper lawn and were just dancing with glow sticks. I'm like, yes, yes! First event success. First event success. That was nice.

I try to make all my events as inclusive as possible, just so my residents feel like if I don't know them, I can possibly meet them at this event. Because there's a lot of residents that come to me, "Oh my God, I think this person is so cute!" I'm like, "Oh, really? I'm about to have an event the next day, you should come by. Tell them to come by, too." You know? (laughter) Because a lot of them are kind of scared. Right now, after the third quarter, it's kind of weird to go talk to them. It would have been different last quarter, or first quarter. Now it's like, oh, I don't know them, I don't know. So, that's why I try to have events to have them get to meet people, even from other buildings. Like, in three, four weeks we're about to have a dodgeball tournament. Biko vs Huerta. Great way for Biko people to meet people from Huerta, you know, throw some dodgeballs at them. And they eat some carne asada. So, it's like--

Vanderscoff: Oh, that's nice. (laughter) So you're in Biko then, as well.

Odiase: Yes, Biko.

Vanderscoff: That's interesting. So then how does your perspective change on this residence, having been a resident there and then now having been an RA in the same space?

Odiase: No, I was actually from Hong-Lim originally; then I moved to Biko. The reason for that was because the first friend I actually made was in Biko. So, I always used to come over there.

Then I met more people in Biko and I knew this is where I need to live. I barely seemed to know anybody in my house except my roommates and maybe a few other people on the floor. So, I was in Biko and I actually love the aspect, you know, it's [named] after Steve Biko. So, when I started to think of houses I wanted to RA for, Biko would be the perfect candidate.

National Politics

Vanderscoff: So something really significant that's happened during your time as an RA [is] some of the work you've done with post-election programming. And so, I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about how the election went down for you, and then at Oakes.

Odiase: I see. (laughs) That's a touchy subject. It was not the best night for me. I remember I was really agitated. I can tell in the way I was talking. I remember that night, after I found out the results, I remember there was these residents talking in the hallway and it was after quiet hours. And that's one of the things I do stress in the house: quiet hours is one of the things you should respect. Because a lot of people want to go to sleep, studying—you should respect that time. You have all day to be loud, play music, do your thing. When it comes to that time, I feel like you should respect that time and let people like go to sleep or study. And my residents understand that. But I understand it was a hectic night. It was a very touchy night. And there were people in the hallways talking about the election, "Oh, yeah, this happened, da, da, da." And I remember I was like "Whoa, what are you all doing?" It came off in a more hostile tone. I was like oh, this is not good. I should probably just go back to my room. I remember I was like, "Okay, you can't do this, da, da, da, you've got to go to sleep now. If you keep on doing this, I'm going to have to document you." I remember the next day they were kind of like, "Whoa, why's he coming at us like this?" The next day I went to the same resident I talked to. I wanted to apologize. I was like, "Of course you should know the results came out, and I was really caught up in the moment."

And it was not the best night for me. I know for Oakes, at least in Biko House, it was not the best for them, either. They were really astonished, like this really happened. I remember a lot of people were crying. A lot of people were crying. People did not come out of their rooms. It was not the best. I remember we went the next week, did a weekly visit, me my co, Rosemary, walked around, "How are you feeling after the election?" See how they are doing. They would say, "Yeah, I'm good, just don't know what's going to happen." Because some of the people are immigrants and they're scared about what's going to happen, you know? Or African Americans, they'd say, "What's he going to do now?" And it's like, I understand. So, we were just trying to keep comforting residents after that.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, that does get at it. So, I guess there's two questions there, which you can speak to. One is the community, and then you yourself—how do you practice self-care in a time where this election has happened, and now that's the political reality that you're studying and living in?

Odiase: Yeah. For me, self-care, (laughs) that's always been a question. My boss always gets on me for that. I always forget to make time for myself. But one thing is music is a huge outlet for me. I love listening to music. I love listening to music. That's why if you ever see me walking around campus, I always have headphones in. Listening to music, it's kind of like my de-stressor. Just go with the music, maybe dance a little. Because it makes me stop thinking about a lot of other stuff and just be in my head.

As for this election, I guess the thing that's really keeping me comforted is you know, this happened. There's no going back. And the worst thing you can do is just keep on saying, "How did this happen?" It already happened. So just hope for the best, keep on living my life. Hopefully things don't get too bad. That's kind of been my words to myself that's been keeping myself above water. You know? One of the things I believe in is everything happens for a

reason. So maybe, hopefully, there's something behind this. And who knows? Maybe there's some good coming from this. I hope everything goes for the best.

Vanderscoff: And then what's your take on where your community, where Biko's at with this? Because it relates to your personal stuff, and then also to being an RA and the sense of community health, where you're at and then where everyone's at in your space with responding to this.

Odiase: Of course, the day of the election and after the election, it was really tense. It was really tense. Even the day after the election, it was somber. I remember seeing people, most of them were down about it. They were really scared. They didn't know what to expect. And that's why the weekly visits really helped. I just wanted to see how they felt about it. And this was a week after the election. And they'd say, "I really don't know what to expect. But hopefully everything does work out." That's a lot of people's perspectives. And then other people are like, "This is really scary." "I understand. I'm scared, too. We just hope for the best."

Vanderscoff: And if the community responds—so, I'm curious, if that's what you're doing there, I mean, what sort of Oakes-wide responses you might be seeing, or maybe university-wide responses? Has there been any of that? Or is this something you see more on that personal, intimate level?

Odiase: I can't speak for the other colleges. I'm not in other colleges. But I would say people I ran into that are in Oakes have been really outraged by the election. I mean, outraged. They were also scared because some of the people I know, like I said, are immigrants. They were really scared. Or their close relatives were immigrants. And they're like, "I don't know how to feel about this, because what if I wake up one day and my parents are maybe taken away. That's extremely scary." You know? That is why Oakes is definitely a comforting place, though. Because the day right after, there was an Oakes event to talk about your feelings about the

election. Exactly how you felt, you know? There were a lot of people in there just crying, talking about how they felt. This is really an intense place. I understand that.

I see the rest of the campus is also extremely outraged, too, or at least I've seen from the protests. There're huge protests around campus, people marching around this campus having their signs. I'm like, yes, that's beautiful. That's beautiful. I always used to say, I don't understand why you're doing it, because he's already in office, so what's the point? But I think somebody showed me it's a point of solidarity. It's just, you see somebody in it with you. It's like, I can't do anything about this situation, but I hope you know we're not for this. I understand. So, I see this campus is also in it together. They also understand maybe this is going to be a scary thing and who knows what's going to happen. So that was comforting, though.

Vanderscoff: That's what happens in these times, sometimes. I mean, you know, you have these troubling events that happen on this scale. But then you do learn something about your local community, sometimes, right?

Odiase: Yeah.

More on Destination Higher Education

Vanderscoff: That solidarity that you're talking about—so that's ongoing. And just, I want to keep in mind, because I know you do have a class, but one thing that you've brought up a couple of times and I want to be sure that we get to is your involvement with DHE, especially since the weekend's coming up in just a few days here.

Odiase: It is, it is.

Vanderscoff: So if you could talk about your involvement with that.

Odiase: Okay. Well, my two close friends were actually the coordinators. They forced me to be an intern. They were like, "You're going to be it. You have no choice." But it was actually kind of a hard process, from their point of view. Not as much for me. But I seen what they had to do and it's a lot behind the scenes to get the high schoolers here.

But coming to the weekend, it was, it is a lot of fun doing it, from the volunteering aspect. I helped out through a lot of events, helping out with the dinner, other small events, like doing the clubs. I was an overnight chaperone for them, too, because they were staying in Oakes. I was like, I live there, so why not help? And I was also the emcee for the dinner, which was extremely scary. Because I want to get better at public speaking, but at the same time it's extremely scary when you actually get thrown into it. And I'm going to do that again this Friday, which is also extremely scary. You would think over time it would get easier. I still get nervous. I was hosting the Battle of the Colleges games, and it also was extremely scary. Regardless of how many times.

But, yeah, the more people you help out, the more who would want to come to this campus. The more friendly people are being towards the seniors, the more the seniors will want to come to this campus. That's what made me want to come to this campus. I've seen a lot of people from DHE that came here last year that are here now. So hopefully the same thing will happen this weekend.

Vanderscoff: That's great. And so how many people are you expecting this weekend? Where's it happening? If that's our current moment, let's get a little detail on it.

Odiase: I just got the information today. We have nineteen women and four men. It is usually a weird ratio like that. I remember my last year, the year I came up, it was about twenty women and I think I was the only freshman, and there was only one other transfer, so there were only two guys. It was really out-balanced.

Vanderscoff: What do you attribute that to, this trend?

Odiase: I'm not exactly sure. That's what I really want to figure out. Last year wasn't bad because it was about ten guys and fifteen girls. It was more balanced. But this year and my year, extremely unbalanced. I'm not exactly sure what exactly goes down behind the scenes to reach out to men, and exactly why they're not coming. I've been thinking about being a DHE coordinator my fourth year. So hopefully I can fix that, have more of a balanced ratio. They're going to be staying in Oakes, the Oakes dorm, since we're the only college that has dorms within their house.

Vanderscoff: And I'm very curious about what sort of advice you're giving these prospective students about why they should or should not come to UCSC, and if they do come, what they should expect.

Odiase: I see. I feel like one of the very big misconceptions people come to Santa Cruz with is that one is I've talked to a lot of freshmen about. They thought, "Oh, yeah, I came because I heard this was going to be a huge party school." I'm like "No, no. You couldn't have been far more wrong. That's one of the big misconceptions." So that's one thing I do say, one of the disclaimers. Because I feel like a lot of people do come to this college for the party life, and this definitely is not the campus for that.

Also, a lot of people do come to this campus for the environment. And that's not the reason I came for. Because like I said, me and hiking just don't go together. That is not one of my aspects.

Vanderscoff: That hasn't changed, huh? (laughter)

Odiase: Nope, it has not. It has not. I just went to Big Sur on Sunday. Big Sur, Point Lobos. It was a nice view. Nice view, but just getting there was not fun. My friends were getting irritated, like, "Why are you complaining so much?" This is not me. This is not me. (laughs) But a lot of

people do come here for that. So that's one of the things I do stress. If you love the environment, you're going to love this campus. Just walking around, you see a great view; you see all these trees; you see the ocean. That's one thing I do love about Oakes. The view is beautiful—it is beautiful.

But if you're into research, like the STEM fields, it's the perfect school for you. You meet a lot of cool people. I feel this school has a lot of friendly people. I'm not sure about other schools, of course, because I haven't really visited and talked to a lot of people from other schools. But this school is definitely a friendly campus. And I always advertise Oakes because it's more diverse. If you want to be in that smaller community that's really diverse and has its own little home, then it's a perfect place.

Vanderscoff: Well, that's great. So, we've talked about DHE. Are there any other events or initiatives that you've been involved in that you'd like to talk about before we move towards a conclusion here?

Student Housing Crisis

Odiase: I'd like to talk about the lounges.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, please.

Odiase: The lounges—but the thing is, that's kind of a touchy subject. The reason I say that is because some people misinterpret what I am trying to say. Because basically what happened was, the Oakes lounges were closed the first quarter because they wanted to fill it with people.

Vanderscoff: As a dorm.

Odiase: As a dorm. But there was nobody inside the lounges. So, a lot of residents were really outraged, like "Why can't we have a lounge if there's nobody in there?" And so, a lot of residents came up to me and said, "We should do something about this." I thought, "You've got

a point." So that's when I started this petition. I put petitions on every dorm wall and the apartment laundry room, just saying, "This is why we need our lounges back." This was a solidarity thing. "Sign here if you want lounges back," basically.

I got a bunch of signatures. A bunch, like three to four hundred, or I'm not sure exactly how many. But it was a lot of signatures. So, then I remember one of my fellow NAs, Sophia, she's a coordinator, I think, of Practical Activism, the event. And she put it on one of the panels. That's when it kind of caught wind. And one of the housing coordinators, the college administrative officers, I think, came and talked to us and said "Okay, we can probably work things out." And they were going to give us one lounge and leave the others as bedrooms. That's not exactly fair to the other three houses.

So that's when we said, "Okay, we're not going to do that." And then I started this email writing campaign. I emailed all the people that signed the petition with a skeleton of an email. We sent this to the housing director and the associate vice chancellor, saying, "This is why we need our lounges back. This is not right."

And the next quarter, we got our lounges back. Now the problem, the reason I say that's kind of a misconception is because of what they said in their email, "We didn't need to fill it, so we can give you the lounges back." That's why some people would say, if they were to hear this interview, they would say, "Oh, we just didn't have enough people to fill it, so we didn't do it." Or that people can say, due to the petition, we got the lounges back. So that's why I'm not really sure about that part, exactly.

Vanderscoff: Do you have a sense yourself?

Odiase: About which one got it?

Vanderscoff: Yeah.

Odiase: I feel like it's a mix of both, a mix of both. Because the lounge petition really showed that the Oakes students wanted the lounge and that they're willing to come together to start a movement to get their lounge back. And then also the housing coordinator also did a great job of placing students, so that way she didn't have to put them in the lounge. So, I feel like it was both that exactly got the lounges back.

Vanderscoff: And the lounges, just for the record, they're used for—

Odiase: It's just a common hangout spot. It's a common hangout spot to study, play music, watch TV, play videogames. Just a place for students to meet up. And a lot of people met each other in the lounges last quarter and this quarter, which is exactly what I wanted. That's been a great aspect of the dorm halls, these last two quarters.

Final Reflections

Vanderscoff: That's great. Thanks for putting it on the record. I'm glad we have that. We've gone about an hour and a half, so I'm then coming around to a conclusion. You've offered a really nuanced and balanced perspective of what this place is. So, one question that I have is what are some of the things that have happened to you here academically, social, in terms of your own growth, that only could have happened to you here, you think. Let's say if you have buddies that might have gone to other schools, or friends you've made since who might be going to other schools—the point is getting at what it is that you think is distinct about UCSC in terms of your own experience, in terms of what that might have meant for you as a student.

Odiase: The social issues. I feel like if I would have went to another campus, it would have been mainly academics. And I wouldn't have gotten the social aspect that I have gotten from here, and learned about all these racial issues, or the gender roles, or sexual harassment. Well, probably would be on other campuses, too. But these other political issues, I feel like I wouldn't have gotten that as much from another campus. Or at least, as in depth. And the people I've met

around this campus have also been really educated with political issues. And they have educated me many times. I'm still learning every single day. And those are the conversations I really look forward to. So, I feel that's kind of the main thing that UCSC does offer. That's why I like this campus. Like I said, everything happens for a reason. And this is why I feel like this campus is where I was supposed to go.

Vanderscoff: To get that sort of an education?

Odiase: To get that sort of education.

Vanderscoff: Right. And what you're talking about with that, of course, is something that's coming from faculty, but then also from staff, and then also from your peers, from students. In that, it's interesting, because of course—so you mentioned that being the key thing that you get here. Because of course you're at a place where your primary area of study is taught to some degree, but not as its own major, as such.

Odiase: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: So how did those two things balance out for you? You're getting this personal kind of political, social education here. And then on the flipside, you're going kind of an unconventional way to get an education in marketing, as it's not actually offered as like a major or communication.

Odiase: Yes. Well, the thing with marketing is you don't exactly have to have the major to do well in the career field. Which is actually perfect. I've learned so much [about] these political issues. If I would have went to another campus, I probably would have got the marketing experience, but not the political issues aspect. Marketing is definitely something I can learn on my own, read books, study through online courses. And the main thing I'm aiming for is internships off campus. And once I have that, that gives me the actual experience, that's exactly what's going to push me ahead. Not the in-classroom work.

Vanderscoff: No, that's great. And then another closing question here is, what do you hope the impact of your time here is? And that could be for you personally, or that could be in terms of some of these other involvements you have that we've talked about—if you think about the core.

Odiase: Like what's UCSC going to leave on me, or what I'm going to leave on the campus?

Vanderscoff: Let's do both.

Odiase:'On me, it's mainly the ability to educate other people about different issues that I've learned here. I feel like that's huge. Because like I said, back at home, we never learned about any of this. Like last summer I was talking to a lot of my friends, and I always used to bring this up. Sometimes it would irritate them, because I brought it up a little more often. But it is something that I feel like people should know about, regardless. That's exactly what I'm taking off this campus, for sure. The ability to be able to educate other people about these topics that is not stressed about outside of this campus.

And then on campus, that is definitely something that I'm still trying to figure out. I do want to leave something back here, not leave a legacy, but something like I've done on this campus, and it's like I can always come back here and see something that I started, help start, whether it is a common event, like the Battle of the Colleges, or say an Oakes event, a tradition we do, like S'more Night Glow Night. Or say the lounges, like say we keep the lounges ever since because of that petition. That would be huge. So, I'm still trying to figure out what that exact thing would be. But I have two years to develop that, so hopefully in time it comes.

Vanderscoff: And so then just as a final question, what do you see looking forward for yourself? I mean, you talked about trying to find your impact here at UCSC, and you talked about marketing. So I'm curious if you could just close us out here, talk about what you see going forward, and then anything else you might want to say.

Odiase: So, my end goal, hopefully I get this internship this summer, which is working with AT&T, doing marketing for them, which would be huge. And my end goal after college is to go into the marketing industry. Probably be a working professional. Most likely within the consumer goods industry, which would be either working with companies like Proctor & Gamble, PepsiCo, Unilever, Nike, etc. My end goal is to rise the ranks within marketing, say like CMO, SVP of marketing. I know that's going to take some time. But I know that, like I said, with the dedication that I've got, started from Allstate, moving into college, I can keep it going. So, yeah, I'm actually really looking forward to these next two years. Because I start going into the classes I actually really want to take. And then I'm looking forward to graduating and starting the life that I've wanted to do since before college.

Vanderscoff: That's great. On my end, thank you so much for you time.

Odiase: Thank you, thank you.

Vanderscoff: And you mentioned that interviews sometimes are a little bit weird for you.

Odiase: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: So then I additionally appreciate you agreeing to come in and sit down and share. And I really appreciate all the work that you do on campus, and your willingness to share it with me and with the project today.

Odiase: Thank you.

Vanderscoff: Thank you.

Manaiya Scott

At the time of her interview, Manaiya Scott was a junior at Rachel Carson College, majoring in environmental studies. She grew up in Oakland, California. Scott works as a residential assistant at Rachel Carson College (formerly College Eight). She is active in student governance and with Black Sistahs United, and helps with the Destination Higher Education program.

Vanderscoff: Okay, so it's Monday, October 23rd, 2017, and this is Cameron Vanderscoff here for the Student Interviews Project. We're in McHenry Library at UC Santa Cruz. So, the way that we've been starting this project is by asking folks to introduce themselves, identify themselves in whatever words they choose.

Growing Up in Oakland

Scott: Okay, my name is Manaiya Scott. I'm a third-year environmental studies major, affiliated with Rachel Carson College, and I hope to graduate by 2019, but we shall see. I'm from Oakland, California, well, born in Berkeley but raised in Oakland. I decided to come to Santa Cruz for what I thought would be a better financial aid package, and to be closer to home.

Vanderscoff: Great, and so we'll explore a lot of that stuff about financial aid, and the proximity to home. But first, as you know, the primary focus of what we're talking about here will be your time at UC Santa Cruz, but I'm interested in what it is that you're bringing with you here to

UCSC. So, I'm wondering if you could say just a little bit about coming up in Oakland, a little bit about your family, and leading into some of your early educational background there.

Scott: Okay. Growing up in Oakland, I struggled a little bit in elementary, and middle school classes. And if it wasn't for my best friend's uncle—he's self-employed at the time and so he had the time to tutor us probably three to four hours every day after class, and that's probably where I got a lot of my study habits, actually, in middle school, just learning how to study on a timely basis and also a reward-based system. So, after we would study and do math problems and homework, we would do Brain Quest. Brain Quest is a really fun trivia [game]. Are you familiar with Brain Quest?

Vanderscoff: Yeah, a little.

Scott: A little bit, okay. So, Brain Quest is a little trivia where you just ask some questions, and I feel like that's also where I got my friendly competition from. So, I don't like to compete, but that was kind of friendly, and being in America with capitalism, you have to know how to compete and how to win. I got a lot of that from my best friend's uncle. Also, growing up in Oakland, I'm used to public transportation. I still don't have my license, FYI. So, it's a little challenging being on the campus with the Metro buses sometimes, but I try my best to accommodate everything.

I think as I've gotten older, and as I've grown up and learned about the world, I'm really grateful that I'm from Oakland—the rich activism history, and how central it is—you can go two hours in any direction and be in the most beautiful places in California, including UC Santa Cruz and Monterey.

Vanderscoff: Tell me a little bit more about how you connected with that sense of pride, the location, and that activist history in Oakland.

Scott: Okay, let me think. When was the first time? Probably in high school. We had to do a project for California History in 9th grade. We were doing a project, so we learned about different parts of California. And then we had to explore different parts in England. We were learning all these things. So, I'm learning more and more about Oakland and the world, and then one day I was like, "I love *Oakland*," just learning about the many projects going on in Oakland, in my community. Like Youth Radio, which I didn't get to work with. I worked with the Chabot Student Science Center; I worked with a lot of different communities. I was a Galaxy Explorer [citizen scientist] and all these things, and just how rich Oakland is. And although we get a bad rap for being the murder capital, or the most dangerous city, at one point, in the country, I still love Oakland.

Vanderscoff: So, you say that you came to love Oakland. Is that a change from the way that you felt before, or what was that kind of new consciousness about your home?

Scott: About my home? Probably traveling. I went to Los Angeles. I went to Texas. I've been to Hong Kong. I've been to Costa Rica. I've been to a few places. I've met people, which is more important, at conferences. And I remember some of my relatives would say, "Just say you're from the Bay Area, because if you say you're from Oakland, people look at you differently." And it was true, for the most part. Sometimes I would say I was from the Bay Area and they would engage with me. Sometimes I would say the East Bay, and that's okay. Some people don't know the difference between the East Bay and San Francisco Bay. And then sometimes I would say, "I'm from Oakland," and I would get a different reaction.

And I refused. I was like, "I'm from Oakland." I refuse to generalize my city. The Bay Area is great, but I'm particularly from Oakland— specifically, Oakland. [If I said], "I'm from the Bay Area," they would ask me about science projects and my studying, but if I said "I'm from Oakland," it would be always geared toward violence, in a way. It would be like, "Oh, have you been shot before?" Just all these very ignorant and naive aspects, which I understand. What's

depicted in the media about Oakland. I get it. But living there for so long, and then also, I haven't really lived in much of West Oakland or North Oakland, but in the middle, towards East. I've lived pretty much everywhere, between my grandmother and my mom. But I'm just like, "That's not my experience." I know people who have been shot. I've seen some violence myself, but that's not my particular experience. I guess it was just me being a little bit more grounded, and saying I'm from Oakland and not the Bay Area. And being proud of that. And telling my relatives that it's okay to claim where you're from if you're proud of it. Some people don't like Oakland; some people can't wait to get out. I understand it, but I think I'm one of the few who plan to go back after college.

Vanderscoff: That's great. And we'll follow that through to your time here at UCSC. So, you wind up coming to UCSC. If you could say a little bit about your family's attitude towards education, and then how you, in that context, came to start thinking about your own educational goals.

Scott: Right. Like I said, I don't know, in elementary and middle school, if it wasn't for my best friend's uncle—I was kind of a little bit off track. I talked to my uncles about college, and then about eighth grade they were talking about high school, and then they had some community leaders come in and talk about after high school. And we were, like, "What do you mean after high school?" And then they were talking to us about college. So, in a sense, my family's expectations, my immediate family, and by "immediate," I mean my sister, mom, brother, and grandma, in particular, expect me to finish. Especially my sister. She's like, "Just finish, finish," and not to get caught up in all of the different type of things the university will try to do to you.

I did get into about seven of the eleven colleges I applied to. I do not remember all the names at this point. I'm here now is all that matters. I did get accepted into a Historically Black College and University in North Carolina, but my mom and my grandma were not having it. It was too far. And like I said, going back to the financial aid package, it just made sense. My mentors

were just, like, "Taking out loans, being closer to home; do you even want to go to the East Coast, where it snows?" I get it. I understood all of those things. But I think I was ready to just go.

But I decided to come here. All the schools I applied to, I wanted to go to. I didn't have a safety school. I know some Upward Bound, and College Track, and different types of college preparatory programs that first-generation college students can participate in, they'll say, "Do you have a safety school, dream school?" There's kind of, like, this three-tier system, but I don't have that. Every school I applied to was a dream school. I love the nature of the campus. I liked it. I did a college tour. So that's why I'm here.

Applying to UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: So initially you have this idea that you'll go to this HBCU in North Carolina, right?

Scott: Mm-hmm.

Vanderscoff: And then you wind up coming here to UC Santa Cruz. So how did you become aware of UC Santa Cruz? And then how did this become the place that you chose, out of all the places you got into?

Scott: So, like I said, it was a college prep program. The college programs, of course, because we were California high school students, provided fee waivers for four UCs and waivers for four CSUs. We got the waiver for, what, was it was $70, I believe at the time? So, we could apply for four UCs for free, being in this program. My mentors are like, "Apply to four UCs." [13]

I applied to UC Santa Cruz, Davis, Riverside, and San Diego. I was denied by Davis, San Diego, wait-listed at Riverside, and I got into UCSC. So, I was, like, "Okay, cool." And at the time I was

[13] http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/application-fees/index.html

like, "I'm not going to go to a UCSC ever. I don't like the UC system." And even the CSUs, they didn't offer me any type of grants, mostly. I was looking for grants and scholarships, of course. And the Historically Black College and University, it was just a matter of my family not wanting to let go and being concerned about how I was going to transition. And also, I didn't find out until later, of course, that a friend that I participated in another program with in middle school was actually going. They went to a rival high school in Oakland, Skyline, but I didn't know they were going. So, at that point, my mom's like, "Do you even know who's going to this university in North Carolina?" I was like, "No, I don't know anyone from my high school." It was kind of like that comfort zone. But once we drove down here; it's only an hour and twenty minutes away from Oakland—my mom also likes nature, also loves Monterey. So, they're like, "I think we like UC Santa Cruz." So, this is what I went with.

Vanderscoff: You went here in spite of some feelings that you had about the UC system as a whole. What sort of concerns did you have about the UC system?

Scott: At the time? The bigger classrooms. I'd heard many horror stories. The phrase, "College is a business," right? So, the entire loan system, the grants, the scholarships and student fees. But, at the same time, if you don't know the history—I knew this before I came to UC Santa Cruz—that it was founded on the [idea that the] state will pay for tuition and then the students would pay for everything else. So, who is this made for? I'm low income. It was made for people who are wealthier, who can afford these things. I think we pay thirty-three fees right now for different parts of our Student Life and Campus Life, so it is a little pricey.[14] So that's why some of my mentors are just, "It's going to be tough if you don't have scholarships, or if you don't become an RA and that can pay for your housing and stuff like that." I knew some things, so that's what I was kind of afraid of. But once I saw my financial aid package—I have to

[14] https://registrar.ucsc.edu/fees/registration/undergraduate-student-fees.html#undergraduate-fees

maintain a certain GPA, which is also a little hard on the quarter system—but I adapted. I'm doing pretty well.

Arriving at UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: Okay, so we've talked about your process of picking this place. I'm wondering if we could go into that moment when you start out here, if you could talk about your first impressions of this place, relative to Oakland, and your first impressions of whether you had a place here, finding your place here.

Scott: First impressions. Okay, so we talked about the college tour. I came up here, fell in love with the nature. So, first year: moving in. I understood that we had the ten-college system, and now we have the Village and other places to live, and the University Town Center downtown. So, I guess my first impression was it's going to be kind of like high school, except everyone was going to be in a college. In high school, we had academies.[15] We had the Health Academy, Engineering—so I thought it was going to be kind of like that focus. I know we have the different themes, but obviously, we will have to see each other in class and whatnot. But it was calm; my roommates were great, for the most part, and I really appreciated the sister college system that we have here—sharing the dining hall. So, I'm with Rachel Carson. I love Oakes. I spend a lot of time at Oakes. In fact, a lot of people thought that I was affiliated with Oakes because I spent so much time there. Or in Stevenson; everyone didn't know I lived in Rachel Carson for the most part, because I was always gone on the weekends. But I just liked being able to go around and travel and walk around campus and stuff like that, just seeing the mini-cities around campus.

My first year I spent lot of time with my high school friends in Oakes. That's why I was there a lot. There was actually a housing crisis situation in Oakes already. I didn't know my first year

[15] Manaiya Scott graduated in the Class of 2015, the centennial class, of Oakland Technical High School.

about the housing crisis, until I got involved, but looking back on it now, [I met] someone who was a winter quarter admissions student trying to take classes and have a place to live during fall quarter. So, I was like, hmm. I didn't understand the legal process, how upsetting that was, until I got involved my sophomore year with the housing crisis at UC Santa Cruz, and [learned] how many people have to double up and sometimes get kicked off campus and all these things. So, I guess my first impressions were quite naïve. I didn't know what I was getting into. But overall, they were pretty good. I liked all the resources, all the events and stuff. Dining hall food, all that good stuff. But eventually, winter quarter hit, and I was like, "Okay, we're in it for the long run."

Vanderscoff: We're definitely going to loop back and talk about the housing crisis and your involvement in that issue. But first, how did you wind up at Carson, which was then College Eight, still?

Scott: Actually, my ID still says College Eight. Rachel Carson was not even my first choice. It was like my third. I think Stevenson was my first choice. I wanted to live in the Rosa Parks African American Theme house (R.PAATH). I don't know if you heard about reclamation and all that those things that happened?

Vanderscoff: I've heard about some of the work that they're doing over at that house, but for the record, maybe you could—

Scott: For the record. Yeah, we just painted the house black, green, and red. The house was supposed to be like this anyway. African, Black, and Caribbean folks were able to have first dibs on the house. Anyone can live there, but ABC folks have first dibs. But basically, I was trying to live there and Oakes was my second choice. But I got put into Rachel Carson and I was like, "That's fine." I like the aesthetic; it's pretty. [The theme is] Environment and Society. That's why I put it on there anyway, because my major is environmental studies. And that's how I

ended up there. And I met some people and even so, I still spent a lot of time in Oakes and Stevenson just by default.

Rachel Carson College

Vanderscoff: So, before we talk about your involvement in the wider campus, I wonder if you could say a little bit about the core course and the grounding that you got in College Eight.

Scott: Yeah, okay. So, [Core Course] plenary was fun; key concepts were fun. (laughs) A little bit. But when I came up my first year, fall 2015, we had plenary on Wednesdays 5:00 to 7:00. And now they're Mondays 7:00 to 9:00. So, having that extra two days, I'm really grateful for, because I see people scrambling on Sundays—I mean, people are doing homework on Sundays anyway—but I could see the stress difference now. That's how I met a lot of my friends, in Plenary, my roommates. And people even now don't speak in class, who would talk in class with me, because it is intimidating to try to talk in front of what, was it 500, 600 people in that class in Classroom Unit II? So, I can understand no one wanting to speak up when [Core Course Professor] Ronnie [Lipschutz] would post a question or something like that, and plus we had to do bluebooks at the end. [But] I would try to speak, just to help me develop my ideas and what I wanted to write about by the end of class.

In terms of my core course, I didn't pass the writing entry-level exam, so I did have to take 80A. It actually took me until spring quarter to finally pass it. I went through a long writing process. Even though my best friend's uncle had helped me with studying habits, we didn't work too much on writing. I think that was because, at the time, I didn't have to do a lot of writing in middle school or elementary school, as I should have, probably. So, I probably didn't even really learn to write until I got here, until it was for the core and plenary in the Writing 20 and 21, where we learned how to write. We're at a research university, and people like things to be concise.

Just for the fun of it, I wanted to go back and revise some of my old essays from high school. I was just like, mm-mmm. I was just looking them over and like, wow. I was like, "That's not okay." So, I was like, I could probably just revise a couple of these just to help me so I could pass the entry-level writing requirement. Because if you don't pass it by your 4th time—they give you the entire year to do it—they do put a hold on your account. I did make some friends who did not make it, which, again going back into the retention and losing friends—already I came in and two people, I think they paid their summer orientation fees and then [the university said], "Oh, we don't want you to come," and they sent them back the—how much was it? Like $250 to come for our summer orientation, I believe, for the day. So, I was already losing people. So that whole retention aspect—until I look back on it has always been there, but I didn't it really realize it until now. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: These individuals you were talking about, they were sent back because of their writing scores?

Scott: No, one friend, I believe it was because of her AP scores. She missed the AP exam, and I feel like she had to pay for her own proctor at that point, so maybe sending the exams late? Obviously, no one wants to talk about why they aren't able to make it through the college application, get to summer orientation, and then—was it a week before we were supposed to go, saying actually, "You've been rejected and here's your money back." Obviously, they didn't want to talk about it, but I do remember. Maybe it was their AP exams. They had a higher GPA than me and SAT scores, from what I remember, but I wouldn't say it was that. I actually don't know. And in terms of my other friend, I think it was the same situation. And also, just sending transcripts. I remember I had to help out my principal. I was just like, "We've got to send this out by this date." I put my transcript in a yellow envelope because I wanted mine to be the first one to be seen. Everyone was putting theirs in white, but mine being yellow said, "Open it first and get it in there," because if you don't, they will reject it. So even high schools with many people, even in my high school it was impacted.

Vanderscoff: So, you talk about retention. One of the hurdles there is this writing requirement. When you think back about your own learning process, when it came to your own writing and revisiting your own writing from high school, what do you attribute that learning process to, as far as writing goes? Is this something that is happening in terms of certain instructors that you're thinking of, or staff folks, or is this peers?

Scott: When I look back on it, core actually was not that helpful to me. My core professor actually did retire after that. So, they were teaching here for, I would say, as far as I know, at least five years. I had physical therapy that year; my therapist actually had my same core professor because they actually went to UC Santa Cruz themselves, which was pretty funny. But that particular class was not helpful. I'm good at peer editing. I can read someone's essay, restructure it, not in terms of grammar and stuff like that, which is also important, but I can say, "Move this here; move this quote." I was always very helpful, but I didn't get that reciprocated from my peers. They're like, "Oh, your paper's great. It's fine." I'm like, "It's not. There's always room for improvement." So, core didn't really help me.

When I got to Writing 20, I actually took, in addition to Writing 20, 22A, grammar and editing. At that time, I thought that was my issue, that it was how I would talk, or the way I would write—like, I'm using too much slang. I know when I was in elementary school I had a problem with run-on sentences. And actually, going through parts of speech helped a lot. Reviewing the parts of speech was simple, the basics. That class was actually intended for international students who had to take it to help out with their transition into writing from whatever language into English. But it was in that class that my professor told me that it wasn't the grammar and editing, it was the body and organization. So, the topic sentence, the conclusion sentence, the thesis statement, run-ons. Sometimes I would go on tangents, not breaking paragraphs correctly. So, little things. But obviously that impacted my writing for the entry-level writing requirement.

So, once I shifted my focus to Writing 20, I'm like, "Oh, that's all you meant." I believe the trick that some of my mentors told me is if you have twenty-pages of reading, read the entire thing and notice where the breaks are. Let's say they were talking about agriculture: they go through food, workers' wages. Read through that, and then read the first topic and concluding sentence to help you read through the entire article. Then my professor said, "I should be able to read the topic sentence, the concluding sentence of each paragraph, and know what your paper is about." I was like, what do you mean? Out of these, like, five pages, you just want to read ten sentences? And I was like, "Okay, all right." And then I was like, ten sentences, that's like an abstract. So, I started putting things together. I was like, okay, that makes sense.

Once I took that approach to my writing it helped me with the sandwich, or the middle parts. I still write my topics and concluding sentences in each paragraph now. And then I fill everything else in with quotes and whatnot. So, I feel that's what really helped me. Then I got to Writing 22; I think my Writing 22 class was probably my favorite class of the entire writing process because my professor introduced all these different ideas about how to read, about annotating, and [using] "they" versus "them"; just different techniques and tools that I wasn't introduced to in high school, that I didn't know about. And once I got it, I was like, okay, that makes sense. Easy enough. And I passed. And I'm a pretty good writer to this day.

Majoring in Environmental Studies

Vanderscoff: Thank you. So, we talked a little bit about your process of writing here. I'd like to shift over and talk a little bit about your primary area of studies, which is environmental studies. So, do you know that you're studying this when you're coming in? How do you come to realize that you're going to be doing environmental studies here?

Scott: Going back into—this is going to reflect back to my best friend's uncle—but basically middle school. Like I said, it was proposed, "What you going to do after you graduate from high school?" In middle school, I was focused on getting into a good high school, if not getting

into a good high school, being able to navigate a poor one, and still being able to get into a university. So, I was trying to get into Partners; it's a program in Oakland.[16] They changed the name three times since 2012, so I can't remember [what it's called now]. But I was trying to get into Partners, and I thought at that time it was almost like a college, but for high school students, so it was very competitive. I didn't get in.

So, then I went to METS, which is Mills Educational Talent Search. Mills College is for women, undergraduate, but now for their graduate programs men can join too, because my uncle actually got his Master's from Mills College. So, I applied to METS, got into METS. They were more focused on the science aspect. So, we did projects on particulate matter, which is a type of air pollution around the homes where I lived—so around BART [Bay Area Rapid Transit] stations, around freeways, low-income areas. And actually, we did it on the street where I grew up, which was really nice, tracking like, "Oh, I that's why I had asthma. I remember I had to use a nebulizer when I was younger, with my brother." And we lived right next to the freeway at that time. But we moved toward trees and away from the freeway, and me and my brother were fine. So, it was a very personal project at that point for me, because I didn't understand why I had asthma and bronchitis, and then why when I moved towards trees—away from the freeway and gas stations—my breathing was better, right? I think at that moment I was like, I like environmental studies. It's very personal for me. That was in 7th grade; we did a project on particulate matter. [17]

In eighth grade, we did a project on earthquake preparedness, interviewing people, "Do you know we're in between two faults? What fault is closer to Oakland? What do you do? Do you know what retrofit is?" Just educating us and then educating the community.[18] So I think that's where my activism [started], and that's also when I started doing more research about Oakland

[16] https://www.college-prep.org/page/the-partners-program
[17] http://static.lawrencehallofscience.org/ays/research/abstracts/2010_AGU_abstract.php
[18] http://static.lawrencehallofscience.org/ays/research/abstracts/2011-AGU-Earthquakes-abstract.php

and activism and community work. That's when I was like, "I'm going to do environmental studies or earth science," since middle school.

And I stayed with it through high school. My high school did take away the Green Academy. I didn't get to apply to it. It did exist in ninth grade, but spring semester came and I was like, "Oh, I'm going to do engineering; I've got to do geometry; got to go to get a B." All these things that I've done and I'm like never mind, "I'm going to apply to the Green Academy." And I went to the fair and there's no table. And I'm like, "Where is it at?" And they're like, "Oh, we took [Green Academy] away, or we're going to combine it with biotech." I'm like, "That's not what I want." I could have transferred high schools but at the time—and I look back on it now (and I don't really don't know), but at the time my high school was considered the best public high school in Oakland for our Unified School District. I have a whole different opinion about that now, of course. But yeah, so that's kind of how it came to be.

They also told us for high school we had to have fifty hours of community service work by the time we graduated, I think. So, I was like, okay where am I going to go? My cousin got the Oakland Zoo. I decided to go to Chabot Space and Science Center and focus on astronomy and stuff like that. And we had a garden, so I'm still very connected with environmental studies and environmental science in that way. And then also, I took AP environmental science and went to Costa Rica. So, I was like, I'm going to stick with environmental studies in college.

Vanderscoff: Okay, so you have this background, not only in being interested in environmental studies, but realizing that it directly relates to you, that it has to do with your own biography, your own story, seeing how it connects. So, I'm wondering if you would share a little bit more about the process of getting into your environmental studies major and courses here at UCSC.

Scott: Right. Okay, so in environmental studies you just have to propose [the major]. And, unlike some of the majors, you just have to take classes. You don't need a certain GPA requirement; you just have to pass with a C and then you can go into your upper divisions.

Once I was applying to colleges, my mentor, in particular, was pushing me to do environmental studies combined with economics, because I want to do environmental justice, like looking into where our money is going. And I'm like, I don't know if I want to do a combined major because we also have environmental science combined with biology and earth and planetary sciences. And I'm just, like, I don't know, I like the environmental studies aspect of it. I did take the semester of econ that's required for all accredited California high schools to get into a UC, but it was just a semester of econ. And it wasn't micro. It was macro and we had to do a stock market project, which I did pretty good in, but it wasn't as intense as when I did those econ classes when I got here.

So, first quarter I did plenary, core and Environmental Studies 80B, which is our changing planet—it's about climate change; apes (AP Environmental Science) all over again. So that was pretty easy. And then I got into environmental policy and economics—a fun class, but just based on the professor's style, the exams were—trickster, which I was kind of used to from my history and English professor in high school. But I was still going with economics for a very long time, did some internships, and talked to some people about maybe some job opportunities after I come out of UC Santa Cruz. But I don't know. I just didn't like the economic component of it.

Even my mentor is suggesting to do the combined economics and set yourself apart and be unique, which I get because it's very competitive. In fact, once Trump was elected my parents called me, "Are you going to change your major?" I was like, wow! (laughs) But it was valid. I understand, being a parent—it's like, "Oh, environmental studies." And then the entire EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) section being completely gone and wiped off the website, and they don't believe in climate change, and then also coming out of the Paris Agreement, but that's after the 2015. But all these things. So, I understand my parents' worry. I did have a scare. I was like, I did pretty good in econ; should I switch over to econ? But I decided to stay with

environmental studies because I still believe there's job opportunities. Or I might have to go find my own, which is fine. But we'll see.

My classes are pretty good. I'm taking two upper divisions right now, and they're pretty fun. We're doing a debate tomorrow in class. But [some] people [don't] like to talk, which is really hard. If you don't do the readings, you can't talk in class. We can't give our ideas. We're like, oh, it's just a grade, just a grade, which is true. You want to get a good grade and get your financial aid. I understand. But I'm like, we're supposed to be developing a career; we're supposed to be experts. I joke with my friends that I see why we're in the state we're in because we're supposed to be college students and want to be studious. And don't get me wrong, I'm really active. But I try to make time for my studies, or I try to at least read a book once a month, something where I know I'm getting my knowledge, and I'm going to be considered this expert for society, then I need to know what I'm talking about. I can't do that if I'm not getting critiqued with counter arguments. And just, you know, being checked. I don't consider it a bad thing or, or a critique of my character, but as in, do I know what I'm talking about? Can I hold a conversation for two hours and not get stumped, or something like that? But people don't like to do that. I think people feel embarrassed. But I try to push just a little bit. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: So, I want you to say a little bit more about what that does for your learning process.

Scott: Learning process?

Vanderscoff: Yeah, that you engage in that way.

Scott: I know that there's a whole bunch of personality tests, but I do consider myself an auditory and visual learner. So, I don't like reading, but I know I have to do it. I do appreciate video, so I like watching debates; I like participating in debates. It's quick thinking on your feet, especially for rebuttals and cross. But I like to be held accountable by my actions more so. In

class, I'll say something and then someone will be like, "Well, what do you mean," like, what do you do? I feel like a lot of people say, "You can't say this and not do it." I got a lot of that in high school just from everyone, so I feel like that's kind of like, what I do. I say something but I'm also active in it. I always try to back up my words because words are fluid and ever-changing. I think actions speak louder than words. So, I don't like to talk all the time, but if we're in class and we're talking about our reading, if we're trying to critique a certain expert in our field, I feel like it's okay to go through it. People go, "I don't understand the lingo." That's okay. I still look up words. If I'm reading something I have a dictionary right next to me. It's okay to look up everything, because if you don't understand a word, you can't understand the rest of the article, which is the purpose, right? I don't think people really appreciate it. They go, "I can read and I'm going to put a stick in the ground; this is how I feel and not talk to anyone about it." But that's not how—I how are we supposed to be this grander environmental society, if you're not sharing your ideas, or if you're not able to develop your own because you're just going along with the flow, whatever that means for people.

Vanderscoff: So, in speaking about developing your own ideas, then, I'm curious about the emphases that you're developing with environmental studies, because people take it in different directions. Some people take it in kind of a farming direction; some people take it towards policy. What are some of the ideas that you're having about where this is going for you?

Scott: Initially, being in the Upward Bound program, I wanted to be an air pollution control engineer. There's really no route for that career path, but grad school is definitely, probably in the near future. I don't know yet. But as of now, I do like the farming aspect of environmental studies. It's really local and I love working with the people, but feel like for me, just being nominated for this [oral history], that I need to go bigger and broader and represent. So, I have thought about policy. I didn't do a legal studies minor, which, a lot of people in environmental studies will do. They'll major and minor, or do their concentration with policy. And even now,

people are just like, "Are you a politics major?" And I'm like, "No, I just like to talk. I'm just talking." But I've been told that if I had to choose, I would choose you to speak. I'm like, "I don't know why. But sure, why not?"

So, I've thought about it. But as of now, after UCSC and going to grad school, I want to stay on the lower levels and then maybe work my way up if necessary, Because I keep getting nominated and people are like, "You should talk in class," which is fine, but I also feel like we should all have a voice, and even if you're not comfortable speaking, you can at least write it down, or I can just be the messenger and just read that letter. I don't have to speak on everything. But, as of now, I know climate change is a big ordeal. That is not something I can [work on] alone. So, I have to find an organization for that, if they still exist and are not getting shut down every five seconds. To be honest. But, right now, just to get some bearing, I'll probably stay with the agroecology aspect of everything.

Vanderscoff: So, you're interested in the policy aspects of this and policy implications and scaling this out. I'm curious about what sort of knowledge and what sort of experience that you've gotten in the past, or are getting now from that on-the-ground farming or agroecology aspect that hopefully then you can—

Scott: Move up?

Vanderscoff: Yeah.

Scott: Okay, so Oakland—back again, right? Food deserts—people not having access to grocery stores, stuff like that. I think, particularly in college, what I'm getting right now is access to different organizations doing the work and fighting themselves, and not being state-funded, unfortunately. So, I'm learning to do a lot of grant writing right now. So, a lot of preparatory work.

I haven't been able to actually dive into typical work, because we have to make sure that we'll exist in the next two years. What they're expecting of students coming out of college is having the ability to write, right, to do a grant writing process, to be able to do a quick bio in ten sentences, not to use technical language. So, I'm learning a lot of skills right now, but I don't feel like I'll be considered to be an expert, or be able to do the debates and talk to the experts for a while. Because everyone's so scared— "Oh, we have a two-year contract and we have to renew to make sure we have funding." So, it's a very, it's a very scary battle of having to do the work, but also make sure you are going to exist. It's always that back and forth. I find that's what social justice is about. You have to make sure you exist in the next four years, but also you need to be an expert. So, I feel sometimes I fall in loops of, oh, being a great writer, and being a great speaker, and I do know the information, but I have yet to be able to dedicate all my time into just studying. And it's the same thing with professors; they're supposed to be here to study, but then they have to teach class, right? So, it's always this back and forth and this interesting balance between being the expert and then also being the helper, in a way.

Vanderscoff: Hmm. And so, relative to that balance that you're trying to strike, what sort of an emphasis are you finding in the curriculum of your environmental studies courses?

Scott: Okay, repetition that we see all the time: gentrification, social justice, and depending on the professors you take, sometimes professors, especially upper-division professors, will use a lot of their readings, or their peers' [writing in classes]. But I actually would say there really is no direct correlation between my lower divisions and my upper divisions, to be honest with you. I'm learning different things. I mean, of course there's climate change and the Paris Agreement. That's probably been pretty much fluid through my entire time here through my department. But yeah, there's always a different type of structure and different information, a different piece from the environmental studies department, I would say.

Vanderscoff: So, what is that difference or disconnect, then, between upper and lower div?

Scott: Lower division, upper division? Well, even lower divisions were very different from each other. We had to do an ecology class, the physical and chemical environment, and then also the environmental policy and economics. So, in the larger scale, they're different. But I feel at the base of all three of those classes—because it was a series; you didn't have to take them in order—but I think at the base it was understanding the small connections, if that makes any sense, the little things that connect us all: how is environment related to economic policy? How is the environment related to the physical environment? Environmental studies is interdisciplinary, so you have to understand all these different aspects in order to be the expert in environmental studies, which I feel like is more challenging, which is why I read different books just to understand where I'm going and where I'm coming from.

The Housing Crisis at UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: I think we'll probably continue to build on some of those things you're talking about, but something that I want to focus on explicitly is, you've brought up these themes of working for social justice, working for social change. So, I wonder if we could follow that thread of your time through the campus. And one beginning for that, you were talking about was starting to develop an awareness of the housing crisis and housing issues. So, I wonder if we can start talking about some of your social justice work and how you became aware of those issues, and then what you did in response to that awareness.

Scott: Right. So, fall quarter I was just focused on my friends, being in Oakes. But, eventually I got a little upset. Like I said, my two friends didn't make it. I had three more friends who dropped out fall quarter, for whatever mysterious reason. I don't know if they were going to transfer. But just seeing a lot of people leave. And at that point I was curious.

So, I went to College Eight (as at the time it was called, not Rachel Carson), Council in my winter quarter. I sat down. The first meeting I went to lasted three hours; it was 9:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. because they were debating about where they want their money to go, which I get,

which I didn't understand then. I said, wow, what a long meeting. No wonder no one wants to come. But I sat through it. And if I did not go to Senate, I would not know about half the things. I feel like that's really unfortunate, because I get it; it's a Monday night; it's 9:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. Especially for first years, right? First years have Plenary from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., so they want to go eat, they want to sleep. They don't want to spend another three hours of their time. But if I didn't go to Senate every Monday from January to June my first year, I would not be involved.

I don't go to Council anymore. I found different orgs and different liaisons to get involved in, for different reasons. I really just went there to sit and listen. I just wanted the information. But they talked to me about the constitution, about voting power, how after three consecutive meetings, you can start voting and start discussing the different budget requests that we get and referendums that we vote on. After that, I was like, okay. I got a little bit more involved and I started to vote and I started to stay for those three hours. [I liked the debating and discussion.] We were talking about policies and student life and climate life. So, I would get the debating. We would read, be like, "Okay, everyone read this," and then talk about it, because that's what we had to do. We had to vote on things. But, unfortunately, it wasn't about environmental studies. It was about campus life, which was also important and also shaped my experience here. But that's probably how I really got involved.

And even then, you know they're not recruiting; they're not door knocking, and even then, I would come back at like 12:00 a.m. and my roommates would be, like, "So what happened?" And I'm just like, "You should have come." And they're like, "I don't want to go." So, people wanted to know, but sometimes they don't want to take the initiative to go seek it out. And that's something that you have to do at UC Santa Cruz because we're so disconnected, with the ten colleges and the resources spread out, that you have to go seek out different things that you want. Sometimes it is inconvenient and can be a bad thing if you can't get around for different reasons, different abilities. But you have to get around. Especially at UC Santa Cruz, everything

is not in one center. People go through different processes. I feel like I have to seek out stuff because I wanted to know what was going on in my communities and with my friends, who are necessarily dropping out, or why I experienced a housing crisis my first year of college and didn't even know what was going on. "Oh, this is fun, you're here," but I'm like, no, you need a dorm.

Vanderscoff: I'm curious about the evolution of your work on this issue. So, you start out going to the Rachel Carson Council, the College Senate. I'm curious, then, if you could say a little bit more about how those issues were taking shape, and then how you found other organizations where you could you carry on the work.

Scott: So, referendums would come through, and then they would say, "Do you all want to vote on this?" And we would have the polls, right? And at that point it became again going back into being the educator [of other students]. "You're all going to have to vote on this one way or another," and people not knowing that you pay for a lot of the things that you do here, your student fees, and people not understanding that. I think what happened for me was that I saw a big disconnect. [Other students thought] that Council and College Senates were uppity people who just wanted to talk politics all day and didn't care about anyone. And then everyone else was like, "I'm going to focus on me," not realizing that we had to work together. A lot of times people don't understand—going back into vocabulary and the dictionary—people don't understand what is a referendum or a poll. I felt it was our job as a Council or the Senate to educate people if they wanted to listen. So, people go in, vote on different co-chairs and different things. "Oh, I'll pick what sounds the coolest," or some people wouldn't vote at all. And I don't think people understand that when you don't vote, how big of an impact that has. So, I feel like a lot of things that we're going through now with the housing crisis, with the tuition hikes, is because of some things that we voted on previously as a student body. So, I guess it can be frustrating for Council members sometimes. I would try to educate my friends

and just break it down for them what we talked about in Senate or Council, and learn about these things.

And also, to get anything in a referendum, or to get anything in a poll, everyone has to vote. The ten college senates have to vote. And the big five, the student orgs, have to vote. So, we were trying to convince people to vote and sponsor us and whatnot. That's how I met some other people because we all have to work together to get this done. So, at the time there were, like, fifteen, I would say, student orgs that we had to talk to, to get stuff done. And that's kind of how I liaisoned into different student orgs like SUA (Student Union Assembly), Black Student Union. I haven't worked for the dean of students, but I'm looking there, in particular, probably maybe next year.

Vanderscoff: And what kind of an impact have you seen from those conversations, if you think about particular issues? Are you being heard?

Scott: Last year TAPS (Transportation and Parking Services) said they added more buses, but I feel like I couldn't tell the difference at the time. But this year I can definitely tell. I've had people tell me, "I'll miss three buses because they're all full until I can get to class," Even last year I recognized it because I would leave, forty minutes before class just so I could catch the bus. Or sometimes I walk. I beat the loop sometime. I can walk from Stevenson all the way to Rachel Carson and my friends will come to the dining hall ten to fifteen minutes later. So, the walking is faster because they have to stop at every single stop, like Kresge and McHenry.

And also, the car traffic is horrible. I didn't realize it, but in the morning the Loops will come, and sometimes I could catch a Loop and get to class on time, but now because of all the cars that are also on campus, it's worse. So, just seeing the lines of traffic in the morning, versus last year, I can definitely see that we have more people on campus, and people have more cars. We really don't have the capacity that we are supposed to be having for people. So, it's interesting. Definitely interesting.

I've heard some horror stories about housing. I've met a couple of homeless students, actually. Sometimes we let homeless students in to take showers in the dorms because they have nowhere to really go. I've met people who sleep in the Metro Station and then catch the bus in the morning and I was like, okay, I didn't know that. And just overhearing these stories on the bus, because people talk on the bus. I'm just like, okay, this is what's really happening. People are really being impacted. Not to say that they weren't, but hearing it and seeing it is different than just reading it, or something like that in class.

Vanderscoff: And what sort of methods of peer support are people developing? You mentioned some sort of a kind of peer-to-peer support for homeless students. What sort of processes are people developing to help each other through this housing crisis? I mean, is this coming from peers? Is this coming from the administration? How is that being navigated?

Scott: So, they're going to build Core West; they're going to build Colleges Eleven and Twelve. And actually, there's going to be a town hall this Wednesday, I believe, coming up 1:00 to 2:00 and 7:00 to 8:00, to inform students what they're going to do. They're going to rebuild Kresge, first of all. That's going to happen. And they're also going to build some more housing across from Kresge. And I think [on] Porter Meadows. That's long-term. Obviously, we're in the now. [19]

So really, what the administration has done, especially for Rachel Carson—and I can talk about this because I'm an RA—they converted the doubles into triples. I remember when we did RA training, and about a week before move-in maintenance people were in the hallways I'm, like, "Are you all okay?" And they're like, "Oh, we have to convert these doubles into triples." So, they're adding loft beds. I know in Rachel Carson we have lobbies, not lounges, I say lobbies only because it's not a closed space. But lounges in different colleges have all been converted into rooms. So, last year, my first year, the lounges in Oakes were quads. Now they're quints. They're five people in one room. I've seen them because I had a friend who was moved into one

[19] https://ches.ucsc.edu/housing/studenthousingwest/

as a third year and I went in her room, and I was, like, "Okay" [Laughs]. So, I was like, all right. And even when the maintenance people were changing the doubles into triples, as an RA I could go in. And then someone just moved into the triple, and I had to do the roommate agreement again, the RCR[20], as part of my RA job. I was like, this really happening.

And then, unfortunately, I don't know if you heard about it, House Four in Stevenson flooded, and they had to figure out how to move ninety people around campus. And we didn't have the space, so they had to convert all the lounges in Cowell, and, like, eight people are in there. And then, I believe nine people moved to Rachel Carson. It was a Monday. It's like 6:25 and we're all getting ready at 7:15 for our RA meetings, and my boss is, like, "I need help moving boxes and I need all hands on deck right now because we have to move people in." People had their stuff in boxes because the house had flooded.

And so, it just goes to show you, if we have a crisis, like that house flood or something like that, the school cannot even accommodate students to be placed somewhere else, right? So, it was really scary to see, not only students that don't have housing, but people who have housing to have to be moved, and they don't know even know when they'll be moved back into Stevenson. I think they're going to be moved back next week, but it happened in, September or October, the first week. It's been good a month since it happened. So,[21] it's just interesting to see everything going through the process and whatnot.

What else has been going on with the housing? Oh, off campus—mm-mm. Off campus is—wow. So, you said talking about taking people in. I just went to the service award ceremony for my college and graduate students were talking. There's a disconnect between the undergrad and graduate students, but graduate students take each other in because [sometimes] they can't do the work from the teaching assistant jobs. It's too much pressure; they're depressed. So,

[20] A Room Condition Form is a contract with students living at UC Santa Cruz on which they explicitly agree to pay for any damages to the room/apartment/suite for the particular academic year.
[21] https://stevenson.ucsc.edu/news-events/news/casa-4-sprinkler.html

someone did say, "I've taken some friends in," because they quit being a teaching assistant because it was too many papers to grade, or whatever. So definitely students are supporting each other.

It's hard to support someone who's in the same situation as you but that's all we really have, is to lean on each other. Even in houses, people are doubling up when they're not supposed to, but that's because that's all people have. The living rooms are converted into complete bedrooms, because that's really all we have. Also, the housing contracts, right? So, if you're not in EOP, or some type of special opportunity program, you only have two-years of guaranteed housing and then you have to go off campus. So, either way, people are being moved off due to the guaranteed housing. They already know they didn't have the space, and actually I believe EOP students are have guaranteed housing for all four years, but starting fall 2016, they only have three years of guaranteed housing. So, they're starting to subtract a year of your guaranteed housing now. [22]

And even if you want to study abroad, they'll take it away. Students that want to study abroad, which is a great opportunity, [and one] which I highly encourage people to take advantage of if they're not too involved on campus, because being an RA is a one-year commitment and a lot of positions are one-year commitments, so it is hard to leave and come back. [But] students don't want to study abroad now because they're worried about their housing. So, they're like, I'll do it after graduation, or some people would do a fifth year. Or I believe, if you save a GE and your short units, they'll pay for you to go. So, some people will walk the stage in spring, and then take one more class out-of-country fall quarter, and then they'll get their diploma. So, different things are definitely happening for people across campus.

Vanderscoff: So, there's this larger picture. I'd like to focus in on you a little bit. You mentioned that through EOP you have four years of guaranteed on-campus housing. Maybe we could start

[22] http://housing.ucsc.edu/guarantee/

out saying a little bit about how EOP has been for you as a resource; if that's beneficial and how that's worked out, or how it hasn't, for you in particular.

Scott: I definitely used EOP resources a lot my first year: the free printing services; I have the guaranteed housing. I've used EOP indirectly, in terms of the services. They have what they call PALs, which is Peer Advising Leaders. I haven't been really involved in EOP, but I do stuff at the office. I do use the Academic Resource Center, but in terms of utilizing and being active in EOP, not so much. But, it's definitely a resource with guaranteed housing and a couple other things, but yeah, that's pretty much it.

Working as a Resident Assistant at Rachel Carson College

Vanderscoff: So, it's played a factor in that sense. And then, of course, you also have a different avenue towards housing, which is your work as an RA. So, you mentioned a little bit ago in our conversation that in your first year here you were College Eight, but really you were spending your time at Oakes, or spending your time at Rosa Parks House at Stevenson. So, I wonder if you could say a little bit more about your motivations in becoming an RA, and then getting engaged residentially with your community there at Carson.

Scott: Um, financial reasons. [Laughter] Unfortunately, yeah. Financial reasons. I remember that's probably the first thing I asked my RA. Our first building meeting I was, like, "When's the RA application open?" I don't know who I talked to, but I had called someone and I was like, "I want to be an RA," and they're like, "Oh, the application's in December." And that was August or September of my first year, before I even moved in. I was like, I need to be an RA; I need to save money. So definitely that was the incentive for me being a residential assistant.

However, I feel like being an RA goes with my personality pretty well. I'm a pretty good RA. I try to be. It is hard to give the tough love, to do the policy enforcement. I made this little board saying my job description: my expectations and your expectations. And obviously, there was no

overlap anywhere between those three [Laughs] because people are like, "I expect this of you." I'm just like, "One, that's not my job. Two, that's too much. That's really time-consuming for me, for you to ask of me." People don't really understand what a resident assistant is. At Stevenson, they're considered resident advisors, and their description is a little different from a resident assistant, but at the end of the day we're all RAs. So, I just tell people, "I'm not going to do that for you." Or they ask me a question like, "Are you going to give us curfew." I'm like, "Just quiet hours, but I'm not going to tell you when you need to go to bed. I'm going to tell you when you need to be quiet, for respectful reasons, because you are in a dorm and the walls are thin, but you go to bed when you want to. Now, when you come to me and you say that you failed your midterms, I'm going to ask you XYZ questions, and most of the time it's probably because of your sleeping habits." That was most of my residents last year. I'm not saying that's everyone's experience. They just weren't sleeping. I'm just, like, "Well then, what are you doing?" And they're like, "Well, I go to bed at, like, two o'clock." And I'm like, "Mm-hmm." It's like, "Oh." I'm like, "Mm-hmm." I was like, "Are you studying? What are you doing at two am?" And, "Well, I can't talk to you about that." I'm like, "Okay, well maybe study if you're going to stay up. Something, you know? Or get some sleep."

So, simple things like that. Also, Senate really pushed me into being an RA, too, because some of the core officers were also RAs. I like Senate and I like Council. And lot of them were like, "I can see you as an RA." I got letters of recommendation from people in high school. I got my math professor to write one because I went to office hours. So, I had a lot of letters of recommendation. But being a resident assistant goes with my personality. I think I'm pretty good at it. I try my best, anyway.

Vanderscoff: I don't know if this has changed in any way since I was here, but just for the record, would you mind sharing what the compensation is for an RA?

Scott: Mm-hmm. Well, basically you don't get charged for room and board. So, you get the single, you don't pay for that, and you get a seven-day meal plan, unlimited. So that's the compensation. We don't get stipends; we don't get paychecks, anything like that. I know some universities do, in addition to the compensation, give the students money, but we don't receive any money. We just don't see the charges on our account.

I will say, and I will always complain about it, because I don't think people really—again, going back into student fees, I didn't know until I went to Senate that people—do you know what flexis [dollars] are? Are you familiar with flexis? For the cafes and stuff, right? So, you have the five-day, or seven-day, or fifty-five-day meal plan—well, five-day, seven-day if you live in the dorms, fifty-five day is an option if you are in the apartments, but you have the fifty-dollar flex that you can use in the cafes, right? So, if I want to treat myself to a smoothie or something like that, RAs do not get flexis because we don't pay for it. People pay for the fifty dollars. I don't think they realize that. So, people may be like, "Well, maybe I don't want to play for flexis anymore." I'm like, "That's cool. But they do roll over until spring, but not over summer, so if you don't use your flexis from fall quarter you'll have like seventy-five, and they'll keep adding up." So, some people have one hundred-fifty by spring quarter. Cool—make sure you use them because they're not going to roll over to the next year. But RAs, we do not get that because we're not paying anything. They're not going to give us fifty dollars if we're not paying for it, right? But, that's pretty much the compensation the RAs do get. And you have to report it on FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid].

Vanderscoff: So that's pretty similar to when I was here. In the RA job, and you've alluded to this, there's different components. One part is the policy component. Another part is the community leadership in the sense of [putting on] events, and then a third component of it is community health, the health and safety and well-being of students. I remember in my time in the job these felt like three distinct things. So, I'm curious, then, if you could share a little bit

about your approach to the job and how you prioritize the different things that you're asked about doing when it comes to being a community leader.

Scott: In particular—you divided it into the community health events and community safety, right?

Vanderscoff: Yeah that's what I think of it. And if you think of it differently, I'd be curious to hear that, too.

Scott: No, definitely, programs are a big aspect of it. Did you use Prog DB? It is basically a little platform that we have to submit our programs into. It's more of an approval process and then we talk to our supervisor about it. But we can attach a flyer; we have to say how much we're going to spend, how we're going to promote it, does it go over Title IX issues, how many people are going to attend. There's just different aspects of the program, where it's going to be held, time, date, all these things, right?

The programming aspect of it can be a little bit challenging. I feel like the university is like, oh the more programs we're putting on, the better we're doing. But from my perspective and some of my co-workers, it's hard to plan a good event, an effective event, every week. So, we were trying to explain to them, "We know you want us to do nine programs? And there's only ten weeks in a quarter, y'all." Well eleven, technically, but finals don't count. But we're just like, "You want us to do something every week and put on an actual good program?"

And then we can do the active one where you're like, okay, I'm going to reserve the Red Room[23], or some space on campus and have snacks, or a passive program, which is not just a poster, but actually has to be interactive. I find those harder to plan out because they have to last about a week. They're supposed to last a while. Active is like, okay, tomorrow is our event: effective,

[23]The Red Room is a common space in Rachel Carson College for community organizations, student organizations, and any on-campus space to host events.

gone. Passive is, how are they interacting? Are they painting? I think my interactive program last year was post-election emotions. How are you feeling about the election? Do three words. Write it down. I said also, "You can tape them to your door, where y'all can exchange notes." Some people were exchanging notes and stuff like that because some people were supporting and some people were not. And I was like, wait, maybe I need to facilitate this a little bit more. But as far as verbal cues and people being harassed, I would say my building did pretty okay. They would respond; they would put their note on their door in either in blue or red, you know, just to have a little fun. So, people were responding that way. And I consider that a passive program. I was surprised people did it because it's a little active, but people were going from the first floor to the second floor; they were talking about it, and that's a passive program. It's supposed to last longer a little longer than an active program.

In terms of community safety—health and safety—I probably put those in the same category, because—whew. I'm not going to get into what's been going on, but some things have been happening this year with the class that have not happened before. They are very extroverted, very bold in terms of what they do in terms of policy violations, which is very interesting. But it also just means to me that I need to be a little closer, to talk to them. Going through different trainings for, not only being an RA, but being a student leader, we talk about alcohol and drugs. They're easy connections. They're easy getaways. What are people doing for self-care? I'm like, well, this is the easiest thing to do, right? It's accessible even though it's not supposed to be. We're a non-smoking campus. People are still going to do what they want to do. So how do you meet with them? It's just like, hey I'm not trying to scare you, but we do have a waitlist of people who have guaranteed housing and who don't have housing. So, they will kick you off campus. I think they're going to take [that] a little more seriously, especially converting all the doubles into triples, or the singles into doubles. Like, after so many documentations and saying, "Hey, you remember that student who is supposed to be here, but they're not here? Can you kick someone out?" They're going to want to kick someone out. [The student says], "Well, you

don't like me, you want me to leave." I'm like, "I'm doing my job," You know what I mean? I don't see you at programs.

Some residents, I [only] see them because I document them. And that really irritates me. I'm like, "I don't want to check in on you because I have to document you." They're like, "Oh, here's my ID," and then they want to talk for an hour. I'm like, "I have my door open. I see you in the bathroom. You don't come to programs." But some residents, you just see them when you document them. And unfortunately, that's the only time I really do see them because they're gone most of the time and they come back at night. And I'm like, "What are you doing?" But it's very tricky. It's a grey area being an RA. It's a 24-7 job. This week is going to be really rough, only because I have a lot of stuff to do and it's midterms week. Some people are going to be celebrating, crying, mourning about failing a midterm, or passing a midterm. You know, they're going to celebrate for whatever reason. So, it's going to be a very interesting week and weekend because of Halloween. But we shall see.

Vanderscoff: Oh, yeah. [Laughter] So then there's that aspect of health. You talk about self-care and that alcohol and drugs are an easy way to do that. And then there's this whole aspect of connecting people to counseling resources. I wonder if you could speak a little bit to that aspect of the job, when you see that issue of community health stuff going down in in your building, in your area.

Scott: I would say I'm quite concerned, only because RAs—us as a community— we have to check on each other a lot, "Did you eat today? Did you go to the gym today? Let's go together." We have to take care of ourselves. If we don't, if we start slipping, other residents will start slipping too. Or in some situations, which is really interesting, a particular coworker of mine was having a rough time, and the residents could tell. We're human too, and it was a very beautiful thing because they actually started to do better because they saw the RA in such a bad

spot. I'm not going share their personal stories, but we all knew what they were going through. They didn't tell the residents, obviously, but people could tell. So that was really beautiful.

A lot of people don't want to go to counseling, actually, for the stigma. And then unfortunately, once they do get to counseling, what do they say? [There are a] limited amount of sessions. You've got to go off campus. We're in Santa Cruz. Santa Cruz is a small town; it's not meant for a big university. People don't have access to therapy. So, it's really hard as an RA to say, "Hey, let's go together to walk you there," and then five weeks in they're saying, "Hey, all my sessions are up. I don't know what I'm going to do." It's just, like, okay. So, I think a lot of times, the reason why did my job description—my expectations, your expectations—is a lot of times we become a comfort zone, become a clutch for a lot of residents. Maybe you have forty; maybe two or three of them really come to you on a weekly basis to check in. Which is fine, but as an RA, how do you prepare for that? The training that we do for the three weeks before people move in is not enough for the things that we are going to go through once the residents get here, right?

So, it's very hard being an RA. I would say some RAs check out. They do programs and then they're in their rooms. They're not around. The residents don't see them, except maybe at night. Or there are the RAs who are really connected to their residents, but you don't see the residents until a documentation. So, it's a very interesting balance in some weeks, like this one coming up. I got a new resident who just moved into a triple and they're already having issues, so I have to go in and help with the roommate agreement and stuff like that. But that's what I got to do; that's what I signed up for, right? In a sense, I would say getting the single and the meal plan limited is a bonus for what we do. If I can say that much, you know? And it's just is not enough. It's not enough. But that's why I initially got it, right? The single is for them, basically, when they want to have a private conversation. They say it's for you, "Oh, it's really cool," but if they want to talk about their roommate, you can't go in the bathroom; you can't go in the lounge room. [So they say], "Oh, can we go to your room?" That's what my room is for, right?

That's why I live by myself. It's an office, like therapy sessions. People are like, "Oh, you've got a single. That's so cool." I mean, yeah, I sleep there, but most of the time I have five people in and out of there every day because they need to talk. It's for privacy reasons, right? So, I don't think people understand. "I want a single room. I'm going to be an RA!" I'm like, "No, no, no. It's yours, but it's not really," in a sense, is what I'm trying to say. A lot of people come in my room a lot.

Vanderscoff: And so, it seems that part of what you're describing is that this housing crisis is really impacting your role as an RA, and what it means to be a student leader on a daily basis.

Scott: On a daily basis, yeah. It's tough. Yes, it's impacting everyone, even the dining halls. The lines, especially for Rachel Carson, if any one's familiar, there's the mailroom, and most of the time the dining hall, the line will be right there. That's how long it gets. I've seen it all the way up the stairs by Rachel Carson. I've seen it all the way across, wrapped around to the upper lawn of Rachel Carson. The lines are ridiculous. And in the dining hall, the food quality is just getting worse and worse. They do burger bars, quick stuff, because that's what they can do in the amount of time that they have. But it's impacting the dining hall, TAPS, RAs because now we have more residents. And they really don't say in your contract how many people you're supposed to have, but if you're converting all my doubles into triples, that's ten more people I have to meet, have to get to know, because you don't want to be like, "Hey, you." You want to know their name. You want them to feel acknowledged. So, it's like I got to hurry up and go get to know them.

And I tell my residents, "If you know, I probably don't know, for privacy reasons." They're like, "Hey, did you know this happened?" And I'm like, "No. If y'all do not come to weekly visits, or if I'm not checking in every day"—because compared to last year, I'm doing 10:00 to 11:00, 5:30 to 6:30, 9:00 o'clock in the morning, because people are everywhere. I have juniors, sophomores, and first years now. I'm trying to see everyone as much as I can, but people are gone. So, when I

come back it's like, "I didn't know this happened. But thank you for telling me, and let's go address it." Sometimes, even though we're first responders, sometimes we're the last to know, which is really irritating. It's very frustrating, actually. So, there's an interesting dynamic in that sense, too.

Vanderscoff: So, you talk about self-care. I'm curious if you'd be willing to talk about what are your own practices of self-care? Where are you in all of this?

Scott: Yeah, definitely. (laughs) Swim. I have to swim. I have to get myself in the pool even though even though I'm like, I don't want to do my hair. We don't even have chlorine in the pool, but just washing my hair. Because it does take a while because I have to prep myself, get back my hair and my clothes and get dry, but I'm like, I need to get in the pool because when I'm swimming, I don't think about anything else. If I am, that means I'm really stressed. That did happen last winter quarter. I was really stressed. My coach was like, "You're zig-zagging in a line." I almost hit my head on the wall. I just was not in a good place and I could tell because when I'm swimming I'm usually thinking about my kicking, my breathing, how I'm pulling the water. But that particular day I was thinking about everything. My coach was just like, "What's wrong with you? You're out of it. You're out of alignment." I was just like, oh, okay. So, I swim. I also try to go to the gym. And then about every two weeks I try to get my hands and feet done. Massages are important.

And I also tell people I know—for different reasons, especially sexual violence survivors, they don't like to be touched. But for different reasons—a hug versus a handshake, for me, is a big, big difference. [I'm] professional, but with my residents I'm closer to, I'm like, "Do you want a hug?" A lot of people like hugs. They don't realize it. Oh, I haven't had a hug in a while. And what does that mean? We're human beings, you know? We get into this robot mode here. "I have to do this; we're on a schedule, and it's like, "Er, er, er." Take a moment, maybe give a hug to someone that you're comfortable with, or a handshake, some type of type of touch, human

contact, something like that. Nothing inappropriate, but just, we're human beings. It's okay, you know?

Also, in addition to swimming and going to the gym, I write. Sometimes I get really upset and I write poetry. I just type it on my phone until I can go to sleep. I'm like, okay, I'm tired. I like to rhyme and I'm into stanzas and poetry and very different styles of how do things. That takes a lot of brain power in itself because I want it to be right how I want to be. I don't share. It's just something for me—self-care. I do that. Also, just once a week, I try to meet with people, go out, hang out, stuff like that.

Getting off campus is not a thing anymore. It's just so many people. I started to do what I did first year and go explore. But I just stay there now and just sit there and do homework or something. So, it's different by the week, of what I need. Like this week, I'm doing a lot of work, so I probably won't swim, but I'll go to the gym and do bicycling because I don't have the time to wash my hair. I will do some type of physical activity, like today I just walked here. They're like, "Do you want to catch the bus?" and I'm like, "No." Let's just go for a walk. And it was nice. It was quiet. So yeah, it's the little things when you're at UC Santa Cruz that you realize that you stop doing for yourself. Or I rearrange my room. I decorate. It's fun, too. I like doing that.

Vanderscoff: So, you've already answered this to some extent, but what sort of a role have your experiences with downtown, with the city itself, having a place there, played in your time here?

Scott: The first year you want to explore and go off campus and stuff like that, and go to Capitola, which almost an hour bus ride, it can be, depending on the traffic. But I'm so over it. I don't have a car. The bus—it's a three-hour trip [round trip] to go downtown. And we even Ubered, going there. But we got there, we shopped, we ate, and then an hour of that time was getting back to campus. So, it's a hassle. So, unless you need to go get some laundry detergent, some stuff that you need, I really don't go off campus. Movies, maybe once in a while, but I

don't go off campus anymore. It's the traffic. Pacific street *is* the downtown; that's pretty much it. After that, there's really nothing to do. Or maybe if I'm going to someone's house, but I really have no connection to downtown. And that's where a lot of the collaborations come [from] with the resource centers but a lot of times they want to come up to campus. Most of the time you're emailing them and their offices are really small. They don't have the space to hold meetings. They'd rather come up to campus, which I find interesting, because sometimes I'm like, "I'll go downtown for a meeting," but their office is really, really small.

Vanderscoff: So, these are community organizations?

Scott: Community organizations, yeah. The offices are smaller and they like coming up on campus. They like seeing the students, I get it. But, I try to give and take. Like, "I can come to you." And oftentimes they have cars, so they know that you might be late because you missed the bus, or you didn't get on, or it broke down—whatever the reason is. So, they'd rather just drive up here. But, we'll see. They're just different.

Vanderscoff: And what kind of organizations are you having this contact with then?

Scott: Organizations? Food not Bombs, the Santa Cruz AIDS Project, just things I'm working on to collaborate in the past and future have the offices and stuff like that. And they'd just rather do email, a phone call, or come up here.

Vanderscoff: And so, then, these collaborations—is this something that you're bringing them in as a part of the RA programming? Or this is a part of one of your different affiliations? Where does this all fit it?

Scott: It depends. It's for both. For Rachel—well, when we were called College Eight, every Friday we had a program. I got December 1st this year, which is AIDS Day, so I wanted to collaborate with the Santa Cruz AIDS Project. They have a vigil on December 1st every year in the Quarry right here on the east side of campus. But I wanted to do something on the west side

of campus, because I have to, right? I asked, "Would you all come to Rachel Carson? I want to make this a big thing." Or, I would just have to plan everything, with their help, with their resources and stuff like that. And maybe play a video, but I have to pay for that, so I don't know. I'm going to talk to my supervisor about that. It's a very interesting play in the Red Room, but we shall see.

But yeah, just different connections for collaboration because we're all trying to do the same thing. Especially because we have the ten colleges and orgs off campus and on campus, it's disconnected chaos. They'll be three [RA-organized] programs going on the same day. And I'm not talking about small-scale programs, but big-scale programs. (sighs) And I'm like, I don't want to choose. We're not communicating. There's no really generalized calendar that people can access. Well, Prog DB, but that's your own research, and it's by college even then, right? So, it will say "upcoming for the next week," but you have to check all ten and they're not even including the Resource Centers. Because we're all required to put on these programs, but when people say "collab," I don't think they understand how to "collab." If we're going to collaborate, that means we shouldn't have to do maybe two to three programs because we collaborate on this really big one, depending how large we want it to be, if we're going to bring in guest speakers, all these things. But, it's really difficult and complicated. So, I try to plan my small-scale programs on the weekdays, and if I'm doing a weekend event, like the Friday one, Friday through to the weekend, I'll try to collaborate with S.H.O.P. [Student Health Outreach and Promotion Program] and the Santa Cruz AIDS Project. We'll see how that goes. But if not, I'll probably do some posters or something, and then walk people to the vigil on the east side of campus if my boss is okay with that. But we'll see.

Black Sistahs United

Vanderscoff: And then one organization—and this was mentioned in your nomination—that you've been affiliated with is with BSU, Black Sistahs United. I wondered if there was anything that you wanted to say about that process, or that particular community?

Scott: Yeah, so actually, another reason why I chose UC Santa Cruz was because of SIO Weekend, Student Initiated Outreach. Again, when you say, "Where's the support?" It's each other. Students helping each other. There is a distinction between graduate students and undergraduates, but from senior to junior, sophomore to first year, there's a connection. I came for SIO weekend on DHE, Destination Higher Education, which is put on by—and we're going through some name changes right now so, I'll try to—BSU is Black Sistahs United, but now we have another BSU called Black Students Union. So, we just changed our name, but I will just say the full name, for the sake of conversation.

Vanderscoff: Thank you. [Laughs]

Scott: So now, officially, in 2017 we're the Black Student Union and they put on the Destination Higher Education program. And they recruit students who are admitted to the university. So once March rolls around, we get a list of students who are admitted and we do interviews, we do phone banking, application process, and then we're able to bring them up here. This is paid by student fees. Students don't know they're probably paying for this, but like I said we pay thirty-three student fees; one of these is used for SIO weekend to bring students up here, mostly ethnic students. So, we have African, Black, Caribbean folks, we have Filipinx folks, and Latinx folks. I'm actually one of the coordinators for this year, so I'm really excited about that.

So, coming up here and seeing there's a community and a sense of black community—that's another reason why I wanted to come. That was important to me. I knew I was coming to a predominantly white institution, PWI, right? So, I was like, "How am I going to do this; how am

I going to do that?" So, I came up here for those reasons as well. So, in terms of a social life, and being an RA—it's very draining being an RA. I just feel like sometimes, "Well, you should educate. You should educate." So, when can I be Manaiya, and not Manaiya the RA? And this is a very different conversation for me, in particular as a black woman. So, it's hard. "Well, you should teach me. That's your job." I'm, like, no, no, no, no. I'm a resident assistant. I don't have to teach you about my life story necessarily, unless I really want to. So, like I said, it's a grey area, a lot of grey area with being an RA and your own individuality as a person, that sometimes people will respect and sometimes people will disrespect, depending on who they are. And most of the time unintentionally, right? But sometimes intentionally, which can also be a very interesting conversation.

So, they're a big support system, as well, for me. I look forward to the weekly meetings just to destress, to see familiar faces. You know, ignorance is bliss. People are ignorant. Some people have not been exposed to different cultures. I'm from Oakland, right? Another thing about Oakland I love: its diverseness. I've grown up with people from different cultures all my life, so some things I just know not to say, or not to do. Other people, they don't, because they are not from Oakland. They don't know. So, in a sense, my mom would say I'm spoiled in a way, which I get.

So even just an hour and twenty minutes away and Santa Cruz being the town it is, it's very different from Oakland. Like I said, it's an hour and twenty minutes away—well, depending on who's driving (laughs)—but it's so different. I've been in this fishbowl for a while, and then to come out it's just like, is this a really fair representation of what the world is like? And I'm just like, yeah it is. I'm just like, I want to go back home now. [Laughs] I want to go back to Oakland now. But even Oakland is going through some stuff, which I don't want to talk about right now.

So, they were able to bring me up on DHE. It was a free trip, the bus ride here, and at the time we stayed in the lounges. This year, that's another thing I'm stressing about. We don't have

lounges anymore, so where are we going to put these students to stay for three days and two nights? We've got to figure that out, obviously. But we'll worry about that winter quarter. But yeah, it's just even like those things, right? Me being able to come up here and stay for three days and two nights in a lounge. I believe I stayed in College Nine, when I came up. And last year they stayed in Oakes. The Oakes lounges are gone; College Nine lounges are gone. Where are going to allow these students to stay, right? Obviously, we have advisors who are paid and they're talking to the administration [about this housing problem], but as of now I'm like, "We don't have lounges, and that's our default." I'm not saying we don't have a plan B, but it's just little things like that, right? So, I'm very active in the community. I like to recruit people and stuff like that, so we'll see what happens. That was another big reason why I chose UC Santa Cruz as well.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, I was interested in that, in just the gap, because you mentioned that you had an ambition to go a Historically Black University, right? And then you come here to a PWI, which has quite a different history than a HBCU. So, you've mentioned different things. You mentioned that there's this recent success in getting the Rosa Parks house painted in kind of Pan African colors.

Scott: Correct.

Vanderscoff: Right. So, we've talked a lot about your involvements and what you're doing with the community. I'm wondering if you could say a little bit more about the spaces where you go, the places where you go to be Manaiya.

Scott: Okay. That's fair. That's a fair question: to be Manaiya. [Laughter] Weekly meetings. We do have sub-orgs on campus for black students. For the sisters, for the women, for the men, for the engineers, for the queer black folk, because, you know—we're black this and black this—so the Black Student Union is supposed to be the umbrella, where everyone can come together once a week. So, I do that, and I go to Rosa Parks African American house once a week. I called

them Manaiya Mondays. I've started doing that. And also, spending time at Oakes, or going to Stevenson. If I'm not at Rachel Carson, I'm probably being Manaiya. And I say, I'm an RA everywhere, don't get me wrong, but it's different when you don't have to see your residents. It's very tricky. If I'm going to a friend's house off campus sometimes that's where I'm being Manaiya the most of the time.

And sometimes in my room, depending on who's in there. I'll maybe have friends over and what not, but I'm not Manaiya at Rachel Carson all the time in the sense of, I would say, the black side, the black identity of me. I'm probably not always Manaiya in that sense. But everything else, I'm Manaiya. Yeah, the professional, the RA, all these things—in most of my experiences that I'm involved in, student orgs, they're curious, but I'm, like, mm-mm. Like I said, you have to be professional but personal when you're the RA, but I tend not to cross that personal line too often with too many people, with too many of my residents. The people who live close to me know because we shower, bathroom, brushing your teeth. I see them a lot more, but other people coming down the hall or on the first floor, not so much. You don't get to see that side of me, unless they just see me at an action, or something like that, or see me out of class.

Vanderscoff: We've gone an hour and a half, so just time-wise, how are you doing? [Laughter]

Scott: 12:19. Oh, we can go ten more minutes.

Vanderscoff: Okay, good.

Financial Pressures

Scott: I don't know if you have any more questions?

Vanderscoff: I do, actually, that's why I asked. So, you talked about coming here for a couple different motivations, and one motivation that you mentioned earlier was a financial aid

package, and you alluded to some frustration with that. I'm also looking at your laptop right here. [Laughter] For the record, there's a sticker on your laptop that says, "Fuck tuition."

Scott: Yeah. [Laughter]

Vanderscoff: So, I thought it would be a miss not to bring that up.

Scott: Oh yeah, I put that on there.

Vanderscoff: Because that's something that people are facing in different ways. I'm curious about your story with that.

Scott: Fuck tuition, if you know anything about UC history. In 2012, they did a big protest to get the tuition hikes frozen for five years. In 2017, they were unfrozen, in spring quarter. I got this particular sticker at the UC Student Association Conference during August.[24] That's when all the UCs come together, talk about different campaigns they want to do for the year. So, in particular, this one comes from Fund the UC, I believe, don't quote me on that, but that's where I got the sticker from, from that place. And it was very fun. SUA puts it on, the Student Union Assembly, the student government for the UC Santa Cruz campus.[25]

But tuition is expensive. Some people can pay for the room and board, the guaranteed housing, but some people can't pay for their tuition. In my personal experience, I didn't know how I was going to pay for things. I'm like, I got the Cal Grant. I got some money, got some scholarships but how am I going to guarantee I'm going to be here for four years? Don't plan for your first two years and then not have a plan for your junior and senior year, which a lot of people do. So, my problem was going to be tuition. I'm like, I'm going to be all right for so long, probably going to get tired, and then I gotta pay for tuition. So what was that going to be?

[24] https://theaggie.org/2017/01/12/uc-csu-systems-consider-first-tuition-increases-after-five-year-tuition-freeze/
[25] https://ucsa.org/fund-the-uc/

I [recently] heard something about Pell Grants are being snatched. So, going back to that. So again, something that we got to talk about because that's how we pay for things a lot of times—Cal Grant, Pell Grants, that's how we pay for tuition. So again: fuck tuition. [Laughter] We have to have to go there, mm-hmm.

The 2016 Election of Donald Trump

Vanderscoff: Yeah, keep that conversation going. So, before I get to some closing questions, one thing I've asked all the people we've had participating in this project—we can talk a lot about what's happening with at UCSC, but you're here at school in a time of change, which you've also alluded to, in our national politics, even talking about the EPA getting threatened and what that might mean for your career. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about the impact of the election for you personally, being a student in the time of Trump as president.

Scott: So, like I said, I did the post-election emotions activity with my residents. I remember that week. It was like we were—I mean, some people argue that we are zombies because of the way we eat and stuff like that—but really the campus was quiet. It was at a standstill. It was an uncomfortable energy. I wasn't being attacked, but you could tell people were down across campus. Even me, in that particular week, I didn't go to anything extra. I went to class. I didn't go to BSU meetings. I didn't want to do any programs. I was, like, I want to go in my room. I handled it just by being in my room and closing the door. Some people cried. It was a very, very long week because people were just at a standstill. After people came out of that realization that this is our president—because a lot of people were denying it for a very long time—

Voting. People were like, "Well, you didn't vote." The mentor I've mentioned for a long time didn't vote. "I don't want to vote for Hillary or for Trump, and this is not what I signed up for as democracy." So [we went through] that whole argument, arguing with people for months about voting or not to vote, and then coming down to the finale of, this is our president? People were mad, angry at each other. Like I said, people were in their rooms, quiet, even me. And I

was like, okay, I've got to tap back into it. I've got to, as an RA and just as a student leader, I've got to come back. But no one wanted to talk. We didn't want to say anything.

Now, it's been a year that this person has been in our presidency. I've met DACA [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals] students who are afraid, and different things have been happening even now, and not only just the president, but different agencies. Like the FBI, right. I think it's called a "Black Identity Extremist," and what that means; like, what is a "Black Identity Extremist?"[26] Who has said that? What is that? And you can get on the no-fly list and all these different things that they're trying to do to infiltrate social justice and social change [organizations]. And now certain websites are not secured anymore, for certain reasons. So, the new cybersecurity thing that we have to do for RA training is, it used to be http; now it's https, 's' for secured, right? That's the new thing that we had to do. And actually, there was a security breach spring quarter, in May. It was a phishing email that people got sent. And even now we got an email saying that the Wi-Fi has been so bad because there's been some hackers. And I'm just, like, that's no excuse for why we can't do our homework, but apparently after that thing that happened in May across all the UCs, it's impacting our Wi-Fi. But certain websites are not secured anymore; they just have the black exclamation point with the circle. And what pages are those, right? The social justice pages and organizations are not secure anymore. That's just what they can do on a base level.

But in terms of what's happening for 2018, what's on the list? I don't want to talk about it. But it's scary. I feel like sometimes people are like, "Oh yeah, I had a friend—" But what happens when it's you? What happens when it's your turn? Just because they're not focusing on your particular identity or group right now does not mean they're not trying to shut down everyone at different times in different ways, right? The same thing that's putting my people, black people, in prisons is the same thing that's deporting people out of the country. So just because

[26] https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/15/opinion/black-identity-extremism-fbi-trump.html

it's different does not mean it's not the same pain, or the same trauma, or something that's worse or less. As we say, let's not play 'Oppression Olympics' here. Let's not say which one's worse, or anything like that. We should just focus on all of us at the same time, which can be challenging, but we have to stand as a united front. Sometimes that can cause drama.

Even Congress and the House, even they came together for a while. People who have been fighting for many, many years came together to get stuff done, who have different agendas. Us versus them doesn't matter, because we're all being attacked, in different strategies, in different ways here. Being divided is not going to help anymore. Sometimes people are like, "Well, I don't like politics," so I'm like, "That's unfortunate, but it runs your life in ways that you probably don't want to acknowledge. But politics is your life."

I watch the news and stuff like that, but you have to read as well. Don't just watch your local news channel: [learn] what's going on in the nation, what's going on the world, and then go to websites and stuff like that. Where you get information from is important. And you want to do both sides. No one said they like Fox News, but what are they saying? Because the media depicts how your group is going to be perceived, right? We're talking about black people and your identities and different ethnic people. I see myself this way, but how do people see me when I walk down the street? That's important to know and to be on your p's and q's, as any person that's identified as a woman, as whatever, you know. But, if you don't know that and you're just walking like, "Oh, we're great," and then something happens, that's dangerous. You have to know how people perceive you. You have to watch your opponent. [What] you're saying about me, I need to know, so I can see how I need to approach the world.

After the election, we have more white supremacy flyers on campus. I always tell people, I say, "I understand that the president is a figurehead and so they have no real power. [But] they have the power for the voice of the people. What if Hillary had got elected? It would have been a different vibe, a different energy across the nation." That's all I said. I'm not saying that we

don't go behind to see what presidents do, right? And with the war I'm like, "We are America. We like our warfare. Most of the things that we have from entertainment to hospitals came from war." People don't know that. And capitalism, right? The country as a system is horrible.

And then you have the roles. It doesn't matter what the president looks like; they have a role to do. So, remember that. But in any organization, the person who's leading, leads the energy, leads the people. So, if we have Trump, then obviously all these things are going to come out of the woodwork. [People say,] "I can't believe them." [But] they were always there, but now they feel comfortable to be more present, to be more loud, right? It's all about who's able to have a loudest voice based on their president.

That's one thing that I was trying to explain to my mentor. I was like, "I know you don't like either Trump or Hillary. Okay, clearly. Everyone made that clear. I think that's probably one of the biggest things. People didn't like either one of the candidates. Fine. But let's go back down to the emotions. Let's go back down to the culture. What is the country going to look like?" "Well, who said Hillary wouldn't have done these things?" A fair argument in some ways. But I'm just saying, would we still be in this constant fear of being taken away, being put in jail, of being put on an extremist list? Like, what is that? I don't understand what you're talking about, right? But these are things that we're up against, and I feel like people choose to tap out, which is their choice, but I'm like, when it hits you, it hits you. Sometimes you're called upon things. Some things you can't ignore. Right now, there are some things you can't ignore. I see that a lot more with students. They're like, "What is this; what is that?" I'm like, "Go read a book or go read an article. Then we can talk about it." But some things are going to happen. It's going to be interesting. 2020 is going to be an interesting year. But, we'll see.

Vanderscoff: So if that's the way that wave is moving, there's also been this resistance, the Women's March, and then these various politicized marches, and the increasing vocality of movements like Black Lives Matter, like Standing Rock, this resistance, broadly termed

resistance. I wonder if you could say a little bit about how you see that happening here, for you personally, in this UCSC context—what sort of connections you might feel responding to this situation you're describing.

Scott: It's tough, right? So, I mentioned that local is impacted by national, national by local. I just found out that TRIO programs were [unfunded]. TRIO programs are like Upward Bound programs, which I came on.[27] The Upward Bound program is a nationwide program and that just got [unfunded]. I talked about Upward Bound, I went through Upward Bound. I came up on DHE [Destination Higher Education], and now they're trying to take away SIO. So, what does it mean? It means that literally the things that we built to help and support each other are being cut and unfunded. So, it's always this constant of having to start over.

But in terms of the resistance, it's just little things. I feel sometimes that a simple "hi," sometimes you get that kind of awkward eye contact, so I just go ahead and disengage, because it's my job and I have to do that. But it's a different vibe, but I feel like sometimes for UC Santa Cruz, like I said, the class this year, they're a little more bold, a little bit more wild. I don't know why. I'm not trying to research on them, but I've just seen different behaviors, and I'm like, is it really due to the election? I'm not really sure.

I think in terms of what it means for me, I have to stay aware and read more, way more. I used to do a book once a month, but now I maybe have to do a book twice a month. I have to keep reading and keep being involved. And self-care is important because it gets draining. Sometimes people are like, "I don't know; I'm just feeling down." I'm like, "Well have you been doing X, Y, and Z?" And they're like, "You know, I haven't been in like three days." I'm like, "It's probably time to go." Or even like, you need to eat. Some people really forget to eat. Even myself sometimes. People are like, "Did you eat today?" I'm like, "You're right." (laughs) So it's a different fight for us as individuals and then as a group. So, it's very interesting.

[27] https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html

Final Reflections

Vanderscoff: So, I know we've pretty much run up against time here, and that you've got to study and carry on doing all the things that we're talking about doing. [Laughter]

Scott: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: Just as a way of closing. In one way, this is a venue for you, for your voice to become a part of the archive here at UCSC. And so, I wonder, as people are listening to this oral history interview, what it is you might like them to hear about you, about this institution, your place here?

Scott: Okay. What would I say? Going to college, being eighteen, being an adult, is a big transition. This is something I would like people to know. I say that because I feel that sometimes the things that I could say, or I could do are not limited because I'm an adult, right? My parents are no longer liable for me in terms of a safety net, is one thing I would like them to know. We are all going through transitions, and in particular the students. Professors, professional staff, I think they're pretty much set. But being a young adult is a very interesting time in your life. So, to be at UC Santa Cruz, I feel it could either prolong that process, or it could be shortened, and shorten the time of checking out, right? We're talking about mental health issues, depression. Learning and growing is a cycle. It's an ongoing process, but sometimes people stop at one stage, that comfort zone, and some other people just check out, right?

I want people to know that being a student leader at this time in particular is quite hard. I know a lot of people who wear many hats. If you met RAs before me, and we're in student orgs and this and that, and sometimes doing three jobs is not the best, right? I put RA in there as its own category, because the RA is a job, but, like I said, it's a 24-hour thing. There's academics; the RA; and then student orgs, and work. And doing all four is not ideal. I sacrifice work. I don't work

during the school year. I work during the summer. Most of the time I know what's going to happen, but this year we got a new fee, so that knocked me off balance little bit. But, I'm an RA; I do academics; I do student orgs. So, I sacrifice my personal expenses sometimes. Next year I'm not going to be an RA, so I can start working again. When I graduate, I'll start doing certain things.

So, I feel like at this time and point, people feel like they have to, myself included, that we have to be everywhere and everyone, and that's exhausting. And if we don't know ourselves in the midst of finding ourselves, we can get lost, right? I think what I'm trying to say is that it's very hard being Manaiya right now sometimes. [People say] "Look, you're doing all of these great things," but no one will ask how you're doing, unless you know another RA who's also a president, who's also this, and we have to check on each other and say, "How are you actually doing," you know. It's like, don't give me the "okay;" don't give me that "good." Like, "What has been going this past week? I haven't seen you in four." And even texting, we won't see the text until two weeks later—I'm not going to respond. Things like that happen because we're always doing something on a daily basis.

Sometimes I forget that this is just a stage; I'm going to graduate and then I'm going to move on. But, sometimes when I'm at UC Santa Cruz, it feels like the end of the world, like I have to do stuff right now. Change is a process, right? But what happens with me is sometimes I focus on the baby steps, which is the now, and I'm like, if this doesn't get done, if X, Y, and Z can't get done, then what happens in ten years? An example: TRIOs getting [unfunded]. Tuition hikes are going up. I'm not blaming anyone or anything, but it's just like, history is going to come back to you, right? Some of the things that have made me who I am—it's not going to be the same thing for my nieces and nephew growing up. What can I tell them to do if they don't have Upward Bound, they don't have METS? The programs are gone—they just got [unfunded] two weeks ago. And what are we going to do about it?

So, what I want people to know is just to focus, and I would say definitely to—looking back on this maybe another fifty years later—to examine the mental health of us as students, and not to blame it on technology, because I don't believe it's just technology, to be honest. In a sense, technology does make things more accessible, but how are we thinking? What are we doing that you weren't doing? What were they doing in the 70s and 60s that we're doing now? What has really changed through history? Yeah, technology boom, okay. But what is really going on with us to say, "Oh well, you know, your class is going to be—you're not going to survive past this age because you're not taking care of yourselves." But why is that? What's the reflection of the past? And then fifty years later, where are we at? What are we doing? What am I going to do when I'm eighty? Am I going to be here? Am I going to be sick? You know, all these different things. As I started to say, examine and look back on us, definitely, because we're going to be in some interesting places.

I feel like people think, "Oh, you're going to do great. You're involved in college and you're going to get a job." But it's not the same anymore. In the sixties and seventies, you could guarantee yourself a career path. Now, you're hopping everywhere just to make sure you can pay your bills. You can go back to grad students, and some people I know, even some of the alumni who come back and they're just like, "Oh yeah, I'm writing a book." But we don't have secure jobs anymore. And why is that? Like I said, the EPA just got slashed. I would say, look back on that and check in on that. And don't be so quick to judge us as "Millennials," as people like to put us into the category of.

Vanderscoff: Perfect. Unless there anything else you'd like to say about your own time going forward, those are all the questions on my end. What do you see when you—

Scott: Graduate? I just want to graduate at this point. I don't know what's going to happen in the next two years. Like I said, with the tuition hikes and stuff like that— And it's junior year, right? I have classes. I have all these things. But I hope I'm able to get my diploma because

that's what I came here for various reasons, from historical reasons, to just four years ago what I wanted for myself. I just hope I get my diploma. And we'll see about grad school. I wanted Dr. Scott, but I don't know. (laughs)

And then another thing. Like I said, graduate students are just going for a master's now. They don't want to keep going to the PhD because of the [lack of] support systems. So, we shall see. There's really nothing else I want to say except I like UC Santa Cruz. It's a beautiful campus. And hopefully I'll be doing something interesting. Maybe doing a book? So, we'll see.

Vanderscoff: Great. On my end, especially after everything you said, thank you so much for being here, for your presence, and for sharing your story, both sharing a bit of your work in the community and your studies, and also sharing a bit of Manaiya—you know, these different aspects. Thank you very much for your time.

Scott: Mm-hmm.

A Postscript: Renaming College Eight to Rachel Carson College

Vanderscoff: I feel like we should just get this on for the record, the name change at College Eight. How did that go down? Did it make any difference? [Laughter] I realize this is a funny little p.s., but—

Scott: Of course. So, like I said, my ID card still says College Eight on it. I don't know if you can see that, but you can see.

Vanderscoff: Mm-hmm, College Eight.

Scott: But I have not lost my ID card since my first year, so it still says College Eight. What's interesting—I love alumni people—it is always going to be College Eight. It's never going to Rachel Carson, right? And even on the Student Portal it says "Carson College," which some people get angry at, including myself. Because if you've read *Silent Spring*, Rachel says in the

book that she just used Carson because Carson is perceived as a male name; put Rachel, and she wouldn't get published. So, I tell people, "Don't say Carson College please, because of this history," right? And then, "Well, Rachel Carson College is too long." "Well, then just say RCC." So, trying to help people with that process, and then people are like, "Why take it so seriously? Is it because you're an RA?" I'm like, "No. Because I'm Manaiya and I read *Silent Spring* and I know where it comes from." So, I try to tell people all these things. And I know for Plenary we had to read *Silent Spring*, but that's why I do it.

But in terms of what happened with the first years in 2016 last year—their ID says College Eight, but then they came and it was Rachel Carson, so, "I'm confused. Is it College Eight or is it Rachel Carson?" And I'm like, "It's Rachel Carson now. We just got named." And I explained the whole sponsoring thing, the foundation giving the money and what that means, and why Rachel Carson, and how they're going to change the road signs, which they already did. The only thing that's actually funny, and I don't know if it's right now because I haven't ordered anything in about a month, but we put "356 College Eight Road" for our mailbox information. That should say Rachel Carson. But Amazon or some other websites—they don't recognize Rachel Carson. So, you still have to put College Eight for some things. My mother was like, "It won't deliver." I'm like, "Put College Eight. Put College Eight, and then it recognizes it." So even, I guess, the mailing world hasn't recognized it as Rachel Carson yet, which is fine because that's a process. But some people don't like Rachel Carson; some people are like, "Who is this?"

And then also another big thing is it's the first woman. We finally have a college named after a woman. That's really cool. So, I try to push the name change. People from four years ago come back, and even some professional staff who refer to Rachel Carson will say College Eight. I just say, C8, whatever. It's going to take a while. I think I was actually quoted [in an article], I think I said three months. Obviously, it's not going to be three months. It will probably take three years

for people to get used to the name change, or to even acknowledge it[28]. Or sometimes I will be like, "Hey, did you know Porter used to be College Five, and Oakes was College Seven?" And people will be like "What? That's weird." And I'm like, "Mm-hmm. Just wait ten years now. College Eight will be weird." And they're like, "No, College Eight flows. It rolls off the tongue." Which I do agree with in some ways, but I'm just like, "We're named. We've got a sponsor, so you have to acknowledge Rachel, even though she's passed away."

Vanderscoff: Perfect. Thank you, I realized that we better get that. [Laughter]

Scott: Yeah. [Laughter] Of course, yeah.

Vanderscoff: Okay great, thank you again.

Scott: Yeah.

[28] http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/article/NE/20160918/NEWS/160919647

David Solano

At the time of his interview, David Solano was a senior majoring in psychology. He grew up in Los Angeles and identifies as queer and Latinx. Solano was deeply involved in the College Ten community, working as a residential assistant and was a leader in organizing the Practical Activism conference. Solano also helped teach the social justice course at College Ten.

Vanderscoff: Today is Friday, April 14, 2017 and this is Cameron Vanderscoff here for the UCSC Student Interviews oral history project. So, what we've been doing at the beginning of this project is asking people to introduce themselves, identify themselves in whatever words they choose. And then start us out by saying a little bit about your background.

Early Background

Solano: So I'm David Solano. I am a fourth-year psychology major here at UC Santa Cruz. A little bit about myself—I identify as queer, as well as Latinx. Coming from a Mexican background, I also pertain to a low-income family in the city of L.A. My parents, they emigrated from Mexico, from Oaxaca and Guerrero. I'm a full-time student.

Vanderscoff: That's a great start. If you could just say a little about your background, and then leading in to your family and education.

Solano: I come from a low-income home. I grew up with my older sister, who is seven years older than me, my mother and my father. It was pretty rough growing up in that household because there were some problems going on, in particular, with my father who had a problem with alcohol and drug abuse. So that really played a lot in my childhood. I guess we'll probably get into this later, but a lot of the things I do now, or even why I'm here at UC Santa Cruz, really goes back to what I went through as a child, mostly traumas and specific events that occurred that really took a toll on me for some time. But now my father's really not in the picture anymore. He passed away two years ago. And my mom divorced him when I was seven. So, after that time, we were alone and it was just my sister and my mom and I. We had to face some serious struggles, financial situations where poverty took over and we risked losing our home. We didn't have food to eat sometimes. It was really difficult. My mom—she had a lot of responsibilities, so she took on a full-time job as a babysitter, and she wouldn't really be with us, because that was her job, taking care of another child. But it was for the best and my sister and I understood why she was away from home. And then she'd have side jobs that she would do. So basically, around that age it was more of my sister who was raising me. So, I say I had two mothers. But it was really rough.

My sister was facing her own problems, her own traumas. Seeing her react and partake in certain activities because of what we've experienced was really hard. To see my family—it was something that was like, well, when is this going to end? And as the years went by, my sister met her boyfriend, her first boyfriend. I think he really helped us out a lot in terms of company and making sure that we were doing well. He was very, very different and he has a very unique personality, which helped us move forward. They got married and they've been together for, I don't know how many years. (laughs) [When] they started dating, my sister was fourteen, and he was seventeen. So, it's a three-year difference. And they're still together and they have two children.

And then my mom met my stepdad in 2005 and then things started going to a better direction, or so I thought. Then in 2007 my little brother was born. Then my nephew came, and then my niece came. So the family grew and it's moving toward a very positive direction. But there are still some things that—I guess what we've dealt with in the past still comes up a lot today. I mean, it's bound to happen.

Vanderscoff: So, in all this, are you living in the same area? Or are you moving around?

Solano: I'm from Los Angeles. I grew up in Little Armenia, which is in East Hollywood. I was there until middle school. Then when I was done with middle school, I moved to further downtown, literally in the city near all the skyscrapers. It's chaotic. I moved a couple of times. And now, I'm obviously here in Santa Cruz. That distance really has affected a lot, just because we're very family-oriented and we value spending time together and looking out for each other and making sure that we're okay. So, now that's one of the struggles: keeping that. I mean, the bond is there, the communication is there. But it's really tough, especially for me as a first-generation college student. No one else in my family has ever gone to college, so it's a huge transition for me, and it was really hard to adapt in Santa Cruz because it's very different from L.A.

Vanderscoff: And those are all things I'd like to talk about as we go through the interview, if that's all right.

Solano: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: And before we get to some of those things, though, maybe you could say a little bit about—you mentioned you're the first in your family to go to college. But prior to that, a little bit about the role that education played as all these other things were going on in your life.

Solano: So the schools that I went to, or—?

Vanderscoff: I guess the question that I have is more oriented towards starting to connect the dots that lead to you ultimately going to college, going to Santa Cruz, if that makes sense.

Solano: When I was a child, my mom emphasized that education was really important. But I guess because there was a lot of things that kept coming at us, difficult situations, it was really hard to envision that there would be a time that we would reach our own success. So, I guess a lot of it came from me realizing the situation that we were in, and realizing that I actually wanted to pursue a degree of some sort. It wasn't until middle school where it came to me that I wanted to go to college and work hard to actually do something in life.

I always loved school. It was a sanctuary for me, in a way. Because of what I was going through at home, I didn't want to be at home. I would rather be in school. But then in school, I would also face other problems, micro-aggressions and things particular to my identity that really got into my head, internalized it and doubted myself a lot. Because a lot of it was—being a brown person, the expectations are very low. That's just the way society is. There's a lot of stereotypes, and things that are not healthy, especially for us because we internalize all these things that we are told, like we're going to be criminals; we're not going to make it to college; we're going to be high school dropouts. And even very hetero-normative stuff, like, oh, you're going to get a girl pregnant or something, stuff you're told constantly. You're just like, "Well, that's not really what I envision," or at least that's not one of your priorities or goals but still, it gets to you and eats you up if you let it. So that's a lot of the issues I faced throughout my education journey, for elementary and middle school. '

Elementary was more… very passive, like, "Oh, do you need help reading this?" Little things like that. Or "do you need the Spanish version of this form?" when I can perfectly read and translate English to Spanish. In middle school, it became more of certain identities where students would just—you know call out the flaws you had on you both physical and details on you image. Middle school is probably not the best years for a lot of people. And it was in

middle school where I really discovered and labeled my socioeconomic status, my sexual orientation, or other identities that I had hard time embracing or being proud of. Things that I wouldn't really think about before. And I was being called out for it and stuff, or made fun of.

In middle school, because of all the traumas that I had, I had to go to a counseling center. It's called Children's Institute. I don't know if there's any facilities in Northern California. I know they're all around So Cal. But that's when I had to go see a therapist. And that was traumas from years ago and what I was experiencing at the moment. The experience of having an alcoholic and drug addict father, experiencing extreme poverty, feeling a sense of loneliness, and overall discovering more of myself that I was not comfortable about. A lot of it had to do with cultural aspects, where in my certain culture there are expectations, especially with the males in the family, and I, for one reason, knew that I couldn't, can't meet their expectation that they had of me.

Anyways, I saw how passionate these therapists and counselors were about doing their job and making sure that I was in a good state of mind and getting back up and finding that motivation to move forward. I really loved seeing that passion coming from them. I remember both my therapists, Michael and Sandra, both charming and wonderful people that helped us a lot. So that's when I realized, when I was in seventh grade, that that's what I wanted to do. Because I did get a lot out of that and because I was able to recover quickly from a lot of my traumas, that was when I decided that I was going to go to college and be a psychology major, and give myself a chance to explore throughout high school what I had to do in order to attend college.

My high school that I attended to was a little better than the other high schools around the area—it was new and it was a pilot school, so it had a little bit more resources than others. And they were really smart with implementing and handling teacher-to-student interactions. It was much better than schools that are very impacted due to lack of funding, bad teachers and other stuff. But it was still hard just figuring things out for myself, especially because I didn't have

any guidance from my family because no one knew what to do, or what it took to go to college because I am a first-generation college student. Because again, my family, I guess because there was just so many disappointments and stuff—I guess, the expectation was there, but at the same time, my family had that expectation I would either make it or I wouldn't, mostly coming from my mother. I feel like she always wants the best for me, but at the same time I feel like in terms of building my career she didn't have much expectations or wanted to secure the idea that I was going to make it, just so she won't put herself in another one of those situations where she would get upset and disappointed. Again, it was personal, I didn't know what I was doing with myself and there was not much of a clear path.

I put in the effort of doing my own research on how to prepare, preparing for the SAT and making sure I was getting straight As. Being involved in the community—I think that's what helped me a lot in my personal growth and leadership, and even academically. I started getting involved my freshman year of high school. I joined different orgs and internships that dealt with education and social justice issues. I did a lot, or at least I think I did. Doing the work that involved seeking justice for folks and equality for all, was my fuel to keep moving forward, making sure that I continued growing for myself and for others. And now I'm here, finishing my fourth year, which I totally did not envision at all. (laughs)

Coming to UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: Yeah. So, we'll trace how you got from there to here, to the situation that you're now in. So, you've described how you started finding resources, both within yourself and through participation within the community. And so, in all this, you've decided to go to college. Can you walk us through how you heard about UC Santa Cruz and you wound up going to this place, which, as you said, is a good distance away from your family?

Solano: Yeah. UC Santa Cruz was my last option. I had applied to UCLA, UC Berkeley, and, I think, UC Merced. Those were the three top schools that I would want to attend. And because I

had the waiver of applying to four UCs in total, I was like well, what other UC? I don't know any other UC's that I'm interested in going to. And then I was like, all right, Santa Cruz, whatever. I just heard about Santa Cruz—it's like trees everywhere, whatever. (laughter) So I was like, all right, I guess it will be a different environment. So, I listed UC Santa Cruz. And I applied for all four of them. I got waitlisted for Berkeley. I got into Merced. I got into Santa Cruz. And I didn't get into UCLA. But I was waiting to hear back from Berkeley. I remember the day that I was supposed to say yes to Santa Cruz, Berkeley sent out the final decision. And they were like oh, thank you, after considering, we can't offer you a spot here, blah, blah, blah, blah. I was like, whatever, Santa Cruz it is.

But I had never visited Santa Cruz before. Geographically, I really didn't know how far Santa Cruz was from L.A. I pictured it being by Santa Barbara, like right on top of Santa Barbara or something. So, I was like, oh, it's probably not that far. It's probably two or three hours away from here [Los Angeles}, which is fine, I guess.

I signed up for orientation to visit here [Santa Cruz]. And I remember I worked that day because I had a part-time job at a fast food restaurant. And right after, it was like 10 PM, that's the time I got out—my sister was waiting for me outside. She's like, "Are you ready?" I'm like, "Yeah, let's go." We were going to stay at a hotel and then go to the orientation the next day. And then she puts it [the address] in the GPS and it says five hours and thirty-something minutes. I was like, "There's traffic at this time?" She was like, "No." I'm like, "What is it? Then why is it taking five hours?" "That's just the distance." And I remember, I started freaking out. I was like, oh my God, I thought it was closer. What in the world was I thinking?

I saw pictures through Google of Santa Cruz before I accepted to come here. But that was pretty much it. And then I got here. I fell in love with the campus. Don't regret the decision at all.

Vanderscoff: I'd love to hear about that orientation. So, you drive all the way up, what, the 101?

Solano: It was the 5.

Vanderscoff: The 5.

Solano: One of the roads was closed; I think the 152 was closed, and it rerouted us to this creepy road. It was dark. We were like, oh my gosh, we're not even going to make it to Santa Cruz. Where the hell are we? But it was a really great adventure, I guess. My brother-in-law was also with us and one of my friends from high school, who I'm really close with, was also going to the orientation with me that day. But we were both not aware of what we were getting into. And it just goes back again, to maybe the high school I went to not having enough funding or resources to provide a trip throughout the state, at least, which I now see happen a lot in many of the schools in my area where I grew up. I think students need that. I wish I had that experience. If that opportunity was there, I would have taken it for sure and my decisions would have, I guess, been better. But I love Santa Cruz. And these four years that I've been here, it's been such a great experience.

So, the day of orientation, my sister dropped us off because we got here around four in the morning. We stayed at the hotel and then we woke up a couple of hours later, maybe got like two hours of sleep. And then my sister drove us to the campus. And it was very welcoming: students, student-led, tour guides and good music. They told us facts about the school and stuff like that. And we did icebreakers. I guess that made me feel a little bit more comfortable, I met a couple of students that were going to be in my college which is College Ten. And then that day we were signing up for classes as well. And I was like, I'm not prepared. What am I going to take? (laughs) I knew we had to take our core class, which depended on the college affiliation. And I'm affiliated with College Ten, which is social justice and community. Yeah, I enrolled in classes. And went to each—I don't remember if it was based on majors or certain classes that you would go into, and then they just gave you information of how hard the major was—stuff like that. But at the moment, I was just really scared. I remember I got separated from my friend

because they separated us into groups. So, I was really scared that day. I was like, what did I do? Why did I do this to myself? My mom is always telling me, "Make sure that whatever you're doing, you know what you're doing. Just don't do things spontaneously because sometimes it doesn't come out the way you want to." In that moment, I was like, oh my God, I should have just listened to my mom. I should have just gone to a community college or something. But then I started meeting a few friends. And I was mostly excited to return and move in.

Vanderscoff: Because of meeting friends? What flipped it from you saying, oh, I should have gone to a community college, to saying okay, I can and will do this. '

Solano: I think I came to a realization that maybe it had to take some sacrifice to grow as a person. I don't know. I think mainly it was just the fact that I was already in and enrolled, and all that money and financial aid being processed. I had already accepted. Everything was working out well. So, I was like, all right, might as well just do it. I was in that mode where I was just like, whatever, just do it. Do what you've got to do. You're already in it. Finish it, in a way. So that's the mentality I came into here at Santa Cruz. It was like, whatever, just do it. You're here, you know? So that's how it started.

That fear was still there of leaving my family. I was really sad. So that month and a half that I was still back home after orientation, I was mentally preparing and making sure that when the day was approaching, the day of move-in, I wouldn't cry as much, or stuff like that. And enjoy time with my family as much as I could, because I knew I wasn't going to spend time with them anymore. So that's what I did. We would go out a lot. And I really noticed how much the dynamic was changing. I felt like we were getting closer, or more attached and that was making it more difficult to me to actually come here. Because I was like, oh my gosh, a lot of things are changing. I don't want to leave anymore. It was a mixed feeling, just back and forth. Happiness; sadness. It was just a bittersweet feeling.

But the day of moving came. And I was bawling. (laughs) In tears. I expected it. I was like, whatever, just cry. You're sad and just cry, let it out. I remember the ride. My mom does not like long road trips, so she was already freaking out. She's like, "You're coming this far?!" I was like, "I'm sorry. I have to do this. I already got myself in there. That's how it's going to be."

I had a lot of life-changing moments here at Santa Cruz throughout these four years. So, I think that the reason why I'm here has to do with what has happened. Because again, like I mentioned before, I didn't envision myself going to a four-year. And I was not motivated as much as I am now. I like to believe things happen for a reason. '

Vanderscoff: At the beginning of it.

Solano: At the beginning. And I had internalized a lot. I mean, [I thought] I guess I made it to college, but I was not confident about myself. I still doubted my potential. I was lost in the process. So, it was a matter of time of when I was going to drop out sometime. So, it was more of how long was it going to take me to actually drop out, I guess.

First Impressions of UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: We'll chart that journey that you're talking about. One thing that you said a little bit earlier is that a part of the adjustment here was that this is just a very different place from where you come from. So, I'm wondering, then, if you can go into those first weeks, or first months, and say a little bit more about what the differences were that you saw, and then how it related to you trying to find a space for yourself here.

Solano: All right. I love sharing this. (laughs) I'm from Pico Union. So, all of my four years in high school, I lived in Pico Union. And even when I lived in East Hollywood, I was surrounded by a lot of Latinx folks. So, I was very surrounded with my culture and I was in a bubble, because—I mean, they recently started calling it Little Central America. That's because there's a huge population of Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Mexicans as well. So, I went to

a high school that was 96, 97 percent Latino. Everyone who was in my school looked like me. We had similar experiences, similar struggles and we understood each other. It was really easy to help each other out and be each other's support system, just because we were aware and we knew what exactly was happening in our communities.

Coming here, it was just a culture shock. I mean, even—I'm so used to seeing fast food chains and stuff. In L.A., I love going to this place called Yoshinoya, or Baja Fresh, or things like that. And they don't have that here. They only have the basic McDonald's, which I don't like that. 'They have Taco Bell, which I have to conform to, (laughter) Jack in the Box, and stuff like that. Back home, I had more options. Here I had to force myself to feel satisfied with what I had here. And even the Mexican food here—I mean, there's certain places that will satisfy my cravings, but it won't be the same thing that I have back home. And that's just stuff in terms of food, because I love food.

We had conversations in high school about white supremacy, privilege and oppression, and things like that. I knew systematically it was there, the system in place that we have—government, education, stuff like that, I guess. It conforms a lot to white folks. We would have these conversations, but I never really felt what it was to actually feel a sense of inferiority. I didn't feel that till I came here. And that's where I was like, whoa, there's definitely a diverse group of people that I really didn't have interactions with a lot before. If I ever had an interaction with a white person, it was with my teachers at school. But it wasn't really like peers. Because again, it was a 97 percent population of Latinos, Latinx-identifying.

I started realizing in classes how a lot of my white peers have more privileges, more resources than I had, and a more sense of entitlement. I really noticed that. It's true, then; these conversations we had in [high] school—it's true. There is some sense of privilege in this country, in this society. There are people who have access to things. That's when I started noticing a lot of my identity stuff, like being queer, being a person of color, being low income—

how all these intersectionalities played a role and I never really acknowledged it. So, it was a hard transition. But with College Ten—I guess I was lucky to end up there, or at least dorm there, because—

Vanderscoff: How did you end up there?

Solano: They give you an option to apply to the colleges that you would want to be affiliated with. I read through their themes. And I was very interested with College Ten because the themes that represent College Ten were already themes that I was working with in my community. So I was like, oh, I'll take this to another level. Let's see what it is to work with social justice and community in Santa Cruz.

I guess it's very diverse. My floor had people from all backgrounds: people who were similar to me, who have similar experiences; some people who were on the opposite spectrum of me, but the interaction was really good. My RA did play a role in this, in making sure that we all got along well, and that we would be willing to leave our doors open and just say hi to each other, forming that sense of community. I think that was a major thing, especially during Welcome Week, the first week we were here as freshmen. I guess it's also the urge of students not wanting to feel lonely. Making friends is one of your priorities when you get here, making sure that you are liked, or making sure that you'll have a group of friends.

But going back to feeling inferior—I started feeling this impostor syndrome—[feeling] that I probably didn't belong here, that it was more out of luck that I got chosen to attend college, not because of the work that I have done in the past, which at [that] moment, I didn't even acknowledge because I was intimidated by the smarter people that were around me.

[But] College Ten really does have a lot of programs that you can get involved with. So I started my freshman year here joining a two-unit class about social justice and involvement in the community. That class really opened a lot of doors for me because that's how I met Wendy

Baxter[29], who is the co-curricular program director of Colleges Nine and Ten, the programs that happen which intends for students to get involved. She puts a lot of fun activities and really great programs that I had the chance of leading. Taking that risk of getting involved opened a lot of doors for me. From there on, it was just a fun ride. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: So you're talking about two things. One is that you're feeling this strong impostor syndrome—do I belong here, maybe I don't. And then, on the other hand, you're talking about starting to get involved and finding ways to situate yourself here. I wonder if you wouldn't mind talking a little bit more about how that transition happens. If you think about some of your early classes, where you're having both of those feelings, how one changes into the other? Like, what were the classes or the peer experience or the resources—if you wouldn't mind reflecting on that a little bit.

Solano: I started off really bad here. My fall quarter, that was a mess. I came with no motivation. I was taking Psych 1; I was taking Math 3. These are general classes that I needed to take before declaring psychology as a major. And my core class. And I noticed that I was in the core class that was two quarters. It was a core class that students had to take, those that didn't satisfy the ELWR [Entry Level Writing Requirement]. And it was two quarters long, while others only had to take it one quarter. That was because they were better at writing. I guess we needed more work on our writing. So that happened. I guess the writing part was okay. I remember Psych 1 and math being kind of challenging, just because, again, I was never exposed to, or really taught how to take notes, or how to study. Stuff like that. Or prepare for an exam. And especially in the quarter system, it was very fast-paced. Things were moving really fast.

I was shocked. I was like, wow, I didn't expect this. And at the same time, I had a roommate who was very spontaneous and encouraged me to take advantage of the freedom I had.

[29] See the oral history with Wendy Baxter focusing on Colleges Nine and Ten at UC Santa Cruz: https://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/collegenineandten

(laughs) So I did take advantage of that. Because my parents were really strict back home, I really did not experience what a party was, or what going out late night was. So, I was like, whatever, might as well, I made it this far. I kind of deserve it. And it interfered a lot with my academics. It was a lot that was going on. First of all, I wasn't prepared academically to succeed in these classes. And another thing, I wasn't putting in effort, either. I was taking advantage of that freedom. I didn't fail the classes, but I did get two Ds, for Psych 1 and Math 3. I received a 1.0 GPA for my first quarter at UCSC.

I hit rock bottom at the end of that quarter. And I was like, really? It's your first quarter here and you're already going to ruin it for yourself? It was scary because I guess it got to me that—well, it didn't take that long, you know, to leave. I just came here one quarter and I'm leaving because the school was ready to kick me out. And I remember the advising office kept contacting me that I was subject to disqualification and stuff like that. I was really scared and I was really sad, too, that I was going to disappoint my mom overall. 'Just felt like a failure.

I went to advising—and I forgot his name, I think it was Alex, he doesn't work here anymore. He was a really good advisor. And he told me, "You know what? Just get it together. You're going to have one more chance winter quarter to do your best. Make sure you pick up those grades." That's what happened. I took really easy classes. It was GEs that I needed to satisfy. That quarter is when I took that two-unit social justice class through College Ten. And I did get good grades that quarter. I got straight As. It really helped my GPA. So, I picked it up again. Then they were like, "All right, you're going to stay. Just make sure that you don't mess up again."

And from then on, I was like, this is one more chance given to me. I'm going to take advantage of it. I'm not going to let anything become an obstacle for me. I guess that became my motivation. I didn't want to be subject to disqualification, or even be kicked out, because I knew that I had a purpose. My purpose was to one day become a counselor, researcher. That's what I

was going to do. And I was determined to cut down on activities and envision something long term that one day I will have my career and not be worried about whether I have food in the fridge or not.

So, I started taking my major classes. I retook Psych, I retook Math 3. And I was still getting some GEs that I just wanted to knock off. It was a pretty weird first year, it kind of felt like a waste of time but at the same time it wasn't because of the fact that I gained so much motivation. Then my second year was more focused on my major. I started taking more psych classes, writing courses, and stuff like that that would help me in the long run. But yeah, it was a journey. It was tough. It was really hard to lift myself up again and continue, but it was definitely doable. And it was also really difficult to get out of the mindset that you are not good enough. It something that I dealt with every day and always wondering whether I was doing the right things, ways in which I can become more smarter and stuff like that.

Vanderscoff: And so if you think about that first quarter, versus then the second or the third quarter, once you had this second chance, what were the things that changed for you, either in terms of your mindset, or in terms of how you were spending your time, or in terms of the resources you were accessing? I mean, whatever that mix was. If you had this clear vision in your mind of what you were doing, how then did you get it? Follow that?

Solano: I think a little bit of everything. It definitely had to do with my mindset, and making sure that I was going to make it and finish. Another thing was, I had upperclassmen as friends. And they really inspired me because they were people of color. And it was kind of that thought: if we shared similar stories and backgrounds, I can do it, too. I even asked for help. I would ask for study tips and stuff like that. And they would be like, "You can do this, and go to the library. Don't stay in your room because you're going to fall asleep." Little things like that, that would make me pass an exam or something. You know?

I didn't really talk to my professors as much. Even to this day, I'm still kind of scared of talking to professors, just because in my opinion I have not seen an urge, very rare, that a professor wants to interact with a student, I feel like a lot of time professors are intentionally unapproachable, that's another story that I don't want to get into. But I did change my study habits and the way I studied for exams. And in terms of writing, I made sure that someone else would read a paper that I had to turn in, and even then, I was still kind of self-conscious about that. I learned English pretty late, so it's still kind of hard for me, in the way I speak and write English. Something that I try to improve every day.

And other resources, like the advising office who showed interest and just them making sure that I was doing well. And again, getting involved in College Ten. I would check in with Wendy Baxter and other staff. I think that year I met, who's now my boss, Reggie Shaw, who frequently checked up on me and made sure that I was doing fine.

And then again, I made sure that I was doing what I had to do. So, I wouldn't go out with my friends a lot anymore; I knew when to say no. And then, just using time efficiently and making sure that I got things done.

Majoring in Psychology

Vanderscoff: So if you started to develop these different patterns around your mindset and then around your time and study and all that, I'm curious if we could then take that to talk about your developing in the psych major, which, of course, is an extremely impacted major on campus.

Solano: It is, (laughs) yeah.

Vanderscoff: But I'm particularly interested in this, given that you really came here for psych. And it really has to do with a very powerful biographical connection for you, for something in

your past. So, could you talk, then, about the reality of what you found psych to be through some of those key classes you might have taken?

Solano: Yeah. So, I expected psychology to focus only on counseling because that's what I related it with—psychology, counseling, therapy, stuff like that. So, I was like, oh, perfect, they're going to teach us as if we were already in the job more of skill development and such. When I started taking more psych courses, I started realizing that it was more research-based, and if you had a point to make, you had to make sure that there was already some literature, make sure you backed up what you were saying. I was like oh, snap, you can actually do research with this. I took Psych 10, which I think was child development; and then I took research methods, and that was one of the classes, where I was like oh, you can do research, like come up with your own interests, questions and do a study and such. (laughs) I see where this is going. And then I just started hearing things about how UC Santa Cruz and how it was very big on research, [more] than other schools. So, I was like oh, that's cool. Let me explore a little bit more with this part of psychology.

Vanderscoff: How was that communicated to you, that UCSC was big on research, or was really supportive of undergrads?

Solano: It was just from friends that I would hear it from, even classmates. I had a lot of friends from College Ten that were psych majors as well. So, we would stay in touch. They would be like, oh, you could do research; you could join labs; you can do many things with psych here. Or you could do field study, stuff like that. Just make sure you contact your major advisor, like peer advisors to get resources.

And I did. I started walking into my major department. I had questions—so, what classes do I need to take? Because I didn't even know what classes I had to take. I knew the prereqs: Psych 1, Psych 2, Math 3, Psych 10, Psych 100. That's all I knew, but after that, I didn't know. I didn't even know that there was a general or intensive option. I found out my second year that there

were two options. So, I was like, what's the difference? And I think I asked the major advisor back then: so, what's the difference [between] general, intensive? 'And she put it in a way that general was for if you were really just aiming for the counseling or hands-on kind of work, which didn't require as much classes as you would do as intensive, which is more research-based and more research-intense kind of work. And you were required to do research in a lab and take a qualitative or a quantitative research class. Stuff like that. So, it wasn't until my second year that I found out that that's what I had to do. I didn't know that intensive psych had more classes, which I was intimidated of. And I was like, I don't want to take more classes. I'll just stick to general, which is why I even came here in the first place.

It wasn't until I took my first upper-division course, my winter quarter of second year—it was young adult transition from adolescence to young adulthood. We had to choose a research topic and literally do some research on it, finding literature and what not. That's where I chose a topic on hypermasculinity in heterosexual couples and that is when that spark lighted up that I wanted to do research. I started asking more questions. I had taken Psych 100, but nothing really stuck to me because it was such a quick, fast paced class and they just threw all this information at you. But that's when I started finding interest in research. And now I'm doing research. But it took a while for me to learn these things of my major. The difference between qualitative and quantitative studies, mixed methodologies, analysis, and all that psychology stuff. And they were just making sure that I was taking the classes that I had to take. Because you had to take two developmental, two social, two cognitives, one advanced research course, two outside courses. Oh, and two quarters of lab research, joining a lab.

Vanderscoff: So in such an impacted major, where are you finding out the information that you need to continue in your study?

Solano: Like where did I get that info from? It was from the major department because I took the initiative of asking. So that's how I found out. And again, things that I would hear from my

friends. And I would trust them. (laughs) I guess I 'have a lot of trust towards people. I mean, now I don't. I can't really trust people now. But before, I was very gullible, and I was like, okay, I'm going to believe what you're saying to me right now.

Vanderscoff: You're saying there's been a change in that sense?

Solano: Like me believing what people say?

Vanderscoff: Yeah.

Solano: Yeah. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: I'm curious—

Solano: I just need to take initiative for myself and make sure that I'm doing the right thing, and not rely on other people telling me what to do. I think a lot of it, because it is an impacted major, a lot of it came from my friends and me taking that initiative of asking questions.

[I found] out that it was an impacted major when I couldn't get into the classes that I wanted. So, I guess that's when I realized, oh, there's a lot of psych majors here in Santa Cruz. I can only imagine how many psych majors there are in other UCs and other colleges. I'm like, this is too much to deal with right now. I guess that was one thing, not getting into the upper divs that I wanted to, or had to take. They would prioritize seniors, again, because it was so impacted. It was really hard to get an upper-division course your second or third year.

Vanderscoff: As far as that being impacted, then, so how do you then deal with that? I mean, did you change your plans a lot?

Solano: I did think about it. Because I was like, well, what if I do psych and human bio? I thought about that my first year. But I don't think it was because of [the major] being impacted. But I guess from then on, I just stuck with it. It's just me having a passion for psychology and

really wanting to help people out and also do research. While other people who don't make it in the STEM major seeks psychology because it's easier, which is not, it still requires a lot of work. It's a passion for psychology that I have and the motivation that I have. I don't really care if it's an impacted major. I know my ability and I know what I can offer in the field. So, I guess that's it, just really knowing that I have a lot of ideas, a lot of passion, and motivation and commitment to stick with this. Because I love it. I love psychology; I love research. I'm yet to work with people, which is why I really came here to college, to actually go to a counseling center and actually work in a counseling center, you know? Like I said, I haven't had that experience yet. But I want to. Now it's a lot of research but I'm enjoying it and it's really preparing me for grad school and I'm having a good time doing that.

Vanderscoff: I'd love to talk about some of the ideas that you're following, or groups that you're participating in in psych. So maybe you could say a little bit about Pathways to Research, and then this particular focus that you have about machismo and gay Latinx relationships. I'd love to hear about that.

Solano: Yeah. Yeah. So, I guess, even going back to that one developmental course that I took, [when] I had to do my first research project, or second research project, after Psych 100, that's where the whole idea of the machismo topic came for me. I really focused only on heterosexual relationships. I didn't know how much literature there already was on that. So, when I actually started looking at articles, I realized there was a lot on that and not very much on the queer community, especially with the intersectionality of being queer and pertaining to a Latinx family where toxic masculinity is common and tolerated. And myself, as queer-identifying, random ideas just came up to me. I was like, what's it like for a gay male, you know, who comes from a Latino background, who experienced and had a machista father? How does that affect them and their relationships with their future partners? Or [if] they already had a relationship, how do those values play a role in their relationship? And that's currently what I'm doing, or at least setting up a proposal to incorporate, gender roles, toxic masculinity and dynamics in

relationships whether there's domestic violence or other sorts of abuse due to their background and lifestyle while growing up.

I applied to Pathways to Research over the fall of this year and I got in. It's my own thing. I'm paired up with a mentor who's a grad student in the psych department as well. He's really helping me out, narrow down my ideas. But it all just came back from that one research project that I did two years ago and really having that interest, maybe because my father had some of those characteristics of hyper-masculinity, where he really proved to be dominant and made sure that we knew that he was very aggressive and he was down for anything.

As a person of color and queer identifying, I thought this would be a good project to work on. And it's something that I'm enjoying. I read articles and I find out new concepts and theories. And it's like, I can read this even though I'm sleepy, I still read them. I'll stay up till three in the morning, four in the morning sometimes, just reading articles. Different methodologies and results, and the whole analysis and discussion and future research, it interests me. I really want to learn more. All these studies that have been done are real. Real people. It's real data, real experiences.

I discovered that I love, I have this thing for qualitative research. All the narratives, all the personal experiences that are recorded or documented. I find it to have much more value than just numbers. You know, if you take a survey, yeah, it's there. You've got data. You can analyze stuff. But when you let someone give their response genuinely, I feel like that has a lot more value. 'It's rich and quality responses that can say so much and interpreted in many ways.

So, Pathways to Research really is helping me a lot. I've already done a lot of my literature reviews. Right now, I'm narrowing down my research questions, putting them together and finding out methodologies and stuff like that, which I'm working on. It's actually due next week. (laughs) So I have a lot of work to do this week. And this is for a presentation that I have to do by the end of May. We're not required to actually conduct studies and have results and

analysis and stuff like that. If you were already prepared, or had some work done before—it's all due to time. If you have time, do it. But because I don't have time, because it is a fresh, new project for me, just from the start, it's taking me a little bit more time. But it's definitely something I would want to do in grad school, continue working with that.

I'm specifically targeting, or aiming to get responses from the gay-identifying folks. I know there's more people that identify differently, not as gay. They may identify as bi, trans, pansexuals. And the reason why I'm only doing gay males is because every struggle is different. So, the trans experience is not going to be the same experience as a gay person. I'm really taking that into consideration. I don't want my research to be one group representing all because that's not the case and that's not true. So I really have to be careful in the way I approach the communities, especially people of color, because there are many intersectionalities that play a role. And there are some people that really don't get to explore their sexual orientation because they're worried about their skin color or other struggles that they are prioritizing and dealing with. There's just different levels to this.

Yeah, that's what I'm doing with Pathways to Research. It relates a lot to my major. I'm having fun with it. I'm really excited for the outcome and I'm just moving forward with that too.

Vanderscoff: That's great. Thank you. So, one final question on psych for now before we move to talk about some of your advocacy and activist work within the context of your college and some other things—I also wanted to talk about the Culture and Achievement Collaboration lab. And so, the quote that I have on that from you [from email communication before the interview] is, "We focus on first generation students and also look at how students adapt to the college environment and see whether there are any barriers or obstacles to get in their way." So, this seems to be another area where you're thinking about your own experience—

Solano: Right.

Vanderscoff: —And then connecting it to the qualitative work that you are doing. So I'm wondering if you could share a little bit about that project, and then your own relationship to it.

Solano: Definitely. So, last year I took a class with Dr. Covarrubias, who is my lab director. And I found her research to be very different than the other research that was being done here, at least in the psych department. Because a lot of the research labs that I was seeing was more developmental, dealing with infants, children and other topics related to that, which is interesting to me but it's something that I wouldn't want to fully work on because I have more of a passion working with education and stuff like that, social identities and things like that. So that's what I wanted to do.

There are different projects within the lab. When I first stepped in, I was working on the guilt project, where we were trying to see whether students have some sense of guilt for being at a four-year university because we are living different than the way ourselves or our families might be living at home—factors like healthcare, socioeconomic status, stuff like that that could be different for the family members and just resources available. I even found myself realizing that at one point I did have some sense of guilt in me because I had more home space in college. My family and I live in an apartment back in L.A. It's not a big space like the space I have here. So, I realized that and I was like wow, this is very relatable. This lab itself is very relatable to my experiences. Because it is a guilt project. We're really trying to see if UCSC students feel guilty and what do they do, or how do they cope with that? So, when I realized that, I was like, yeah, I have this sense of guilt, too; I'm over here living the life. My family back home is working every day, making sure they're able to afford the rent. I don't have to worry about that anymore because I don't live with them.

And then, there's another project that I worked on as well. We interviewed UCSC students [on] how they access resources on campus and whether those resources were out there or not. And the purpose of this is to, once we have everything collected, make sure that we inform the

school: like hey, this is what students are saying. We have things to work on. Yeah, we have a lot of things to work on. Because even something as simple as like finding a location is really hard for students. Because we do live in a forest and it's just a lot of trees. And sometimes you're like, am I going to a class, or am I going deep into the forest? Like, you never know. (laughter) At least if you're a first year, that's probably something you can experience. (laughs)

So that's another thing that we've been doing. I guess we aim to hear the perspective of first generation people of color. But we do have a very diverse group of students, a huge representation of each, I guess, category.

Vanderscoff: And if you were to maybe isolate a few of the findings that you have that you think are particularly important, either for you, reflecting on your own experience, or for the university to understand—

Solano: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: What might those findings be so far?

Solano: Well, based on what I'm hearing from student responses, just making sure that we're keeping the resources that we have, or even further improving resources. We do have ethnic orgs and different spaces, but it's very limited. And even with tutoring sessions, we hear a lot about that, too. MSI [Modified Supplemental Instruction] and LSS, Learning Support Services—they're very limited to students, when students actually need these resources to pass a class. Learning Support Services only takes in three people for a session. Do you know how many people are in a lecture hall? There are like 200, 300, 400 people in a lecture hall and you're really only going to offer three spots? What is a maximum MSI session, like twelve?

Vanderscoff: Ironically, that must be something that I imagine would be particularly felt in psych, given how impacted the major is.

Solano: Yeah, I had a hard time really finding that type of help. And again, a lot of the responses do come from first-years. And it's so little time that they've been here, but they already have gone through a lot of experiences. I see it and I'm like, exactly this is what I went through, but I never voiced it. I'm really grateful that I'm participating in this lab because we are documenting everything the students have to say. These are real experiences and we need to make sure that they're validated, and that as a lab with a purpose and an actual mission—we voice these thoughts and experiences and make sure that the school acts, responds to these in a positive way, satisfies students' needs. But again, going back to my experiences, I struggled finding MSI sessions. When they told you twelve was the max, that was the max. They really did not take an extra student. It was very chaotic. And people rush to these classes to sign—it's a first-come, first-serve thing, too. It was so frustrating, because you're just like well, I have class before. By the time I get there, probably twenty people are going to be in line. So, it's really frustrating. But, I don't know. I don't have power. I'm not the person in charge. I don't know the way the school works. I guess more funding. But at the same time, I hear that we're defunding programs, or defunding a lot of things. That's very frustrating. I don't know. And like, with the whole political thing, there's so much going on. So much going on. The motivation we all have, we really want to make sure that at least we get the message across and that we did our job of getting the experiences, getting students' experiences, that we've passed that information on to the people in charge.

Vanderscoff: And actually, one other question that comes to mind, specifically since you're in psych: in the time that you've been here at UCSC, there's been this big nationwide conversation of how to deal with varying experiences of trauma or vulnerability or difference in the classroom. And in particular, I'm thinking about the debate around like trigger warnings.

Solano: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: And since you're in psych, I thought maybe I'd ask you what the conversation has been around that in your classes, given that it's kind of close to your area of study.

Solano: Right. To be honest with you, I don't even think we've ever had a conversation on this. I think it's really important, too because sometimes discussions or conversations can be triggering to people. People cope differently, react differently, individual differences. I don't know. I had a conversation with this one person and they were like, "Oh, life doesn't come with trigger warnings." I was like, interesting, that's very interesting. Because I processed that and I was like, that's true. Life just slaps us in the face unexpectedly. (laughs) And we deal with it sometimes. I've never had a full-on conversation about this but I think it's very important. And it's definitely needed, just to ensure the well-being of people. Like I said, people react differently. When we have a conversation on certain topics, we need to make sure that we let people know what's going to be talked about, what's going to be shared. But I really haven't thought about it a lot.

Vanderscoff: Just thought I'd ask. Thank you. So, we're at an hour and 17 minutes so far. We can move on to talking about some of your college advocacy and activist involvement. The first thing I wanted to ask you about is being an RA, how you came to do that, and step into that community leadership role.

Residential Assistant at College Ten

Solano: I wasn't planning to be an RA. One of my friends was very interested, one of my best friends. He already graduated. And he was like, "Let's go to the info meetings. Just apply. You don't lose anything." I was like, "I'm never going to get that job." It was my second year and I was still in that period where I had very low self-esteem. [But] things were changing; I was changing a lot of things. So, I was like, whatever, I'll go.

So I went to the info meetings. And that was one of the requirements. That was already step one. (laughs) I was like, whatever about the whole process. And then, I actually applied and I got the interviews, the group interviews. Then I heard they cut a lot of people out from the group interviews. So then, I moved on to the individual interview. And I was like oh my God, this is serious. I'm moving forward. I was not expecting this. Do I really want to be an RA? But then I was like, you know what? I'll get to meet new people. I'll get to be a resource. And I think it was more of a motivation for me to better myself, and to be an example, or a role model to other folks. And it ties in with what I want to do which is to help people under different circumstances.

So, then I was like, all right, whatever. So, I did the individual interview. And then a month later—it was literally a month, they took forever—I was getting so nervous at times. I'm like yeah, I need you to tell me right now. (laughter) But they told me that I had got a spot at the College Ten apartments. And I was like, I didn't expect this. I thought I was not going to get it. But you go through the training and how to deal with certain situations. A lot of these trainings deal with mental health and cultural competency, even CPR, stuff like that, how to do a lockout. It was a very detailed training for three weeks, from Monday through Friday.

But when I did get that email saying that I did get that job, I guess that's when I started realizing that it was me. It wasn't out of luck or something. That's when the whole impostor syndrome started going away a little bit. That's when I started building more confidence in myself, and my self-esteem was being stabilized. I was like oh, I'm going to be an RA. I need to get it together.

So that's what I did. I worked a lot on preparing for that and making sure that I would be there for my residents. It's been a challenge. Because a lot of the situations you face take a toll on you. I guess, every RA's story is different. I know some RAs that don't like their job; I know RAs that love it; I know RAs that are like, whatever, I can live with it.

I started off dealing with really intense situations the first week I was on the job. That intimidated me and I was really scared because it involved the police and everything. It was really a severe case. I was like, oh my God, what did I get myself into? But then again, because of the training and because it was my third year, I had more motivation. I was like, all right, you've got to deal with this.

I think that's where I learned to have two faces: one for a job and one for myself. When I was doing my job, I had to become David Number Two. And then, when I was done with my job, I would go back to Real David, kind of in a way. They have the same personality, right? (laughs) But it's like, you can't let these things get to you. Because if they do—again, like I've mentioned before, people react differently to things. Some of the cases you deal with are very intense and, I guess, triggering. They stress you out. They scare you. But my mentality was just to move on. I guess it's a mentality that I've had since a kid—just move on. Whatever. I'm not saying that I'm grateful that those things happened to me as a child, but now when dealing with really intense problems, or certain situations with my residents, I'm able to stand my ground and make sure that I get my point across, and that they get some sense of what they did. And then just move forward. I don't stay with that issue or carry that on anymore.

But I have fun doing that job. My residents do come ask for help with resources and anything I can help them with. It kind of ties in with my counseling goal, where some of my residents come to ask me for advice. They go really personal. They tell me their life stories, or certain situations that are affecting them at the moment. And my psychology counseling instincts then come out and I do what I can to help them.

But it's really hard keeping that boundary when there's that level of trust, and when you no longer see them as residents, but as actually friends and people that you care about. I think that's a fun part of the job. You get to have these interactions and really do what you have to do, which is help your residents and watch out for them.

Vanderscoff: I was an RA when I was here. And there's a couple different parts of the job. One part is what you might call the policy aspect. And another part is the programming.

Solano: Right.

Vanderscoff: And then another one is health-related, which might be mental health, or it might be people's physical health. And so, if you reflect on those different parts of the job, which ones kind of stand out the most for you? Or which ones make the most sense to you? How do you approach the job, and what has the sort of reality of it been in terms of those? Because everyone finds their own balance.

Solano: Right. I think with policy, it's really hard. I mean, I've documented my residents, and that's because I have to. But I'm not a cop. I don't want to get them in trouble. But if I don't report you, and if things get out of hand, I could get in trouble. Stuff like that.

I think for me, the best thing about the job is the interaction. I like the programming aspect, too, because you can get very creative in what you do. The last program I had was do your own sushi. It was a study break program. And in two weeks I'm doing this other program—because it is going to be midterm season, it's another study break kind of thing. It's art—we're doing these mason jars. I'm ordering some mason jars and people are going to try to decorate them, or use them however they want to use them. They get to explore and develop some creativeness, I guess. I was not creative at all before the job. (laughs) I couldn't think of any programs. It was like, what do I do? I don't know what to do. But when you start thinking about things, it happens.

I guess it's really hard, the whole policy again, it's really hard. Because I'm not a bad person. I could be strict, but I'd rather not be. (laughs) But I think that's one challenging aspect of the job, is me having to be strict.

Vanderscoff: Yeah. And then the final area there being the area of health, be it mental or be it physical. What has your experience been? Seeing those issues in your residential community.

Solano: Yeah. I've seen, actually, both. It's really scary to deal with stuff like this because it's very delicate. Sometimes you're given your group of residents, with barely any background information. There's no medical history; there's nothing. And it's very confidential information for them. That's not something we're supposed to know. But when these things do come up, you're just like, oh my God, what's going on?

I remember last year it involved this threat. And it was so scary. I remember my boss telling me, "Can you make sure that there's nothing suspicious going on in the community?" And at that time, my phone was not receiving any signal, because it's very out there near the forest and all the redwood trees. And I was like, oh my God, my phone barely gets any service here. What am I going to do? Well, there's a phone downstairs. I'm like, I'm not going to go downstairs if there's an emergency right now. (laughs) I guess that's one of the biggest challenges, having to deal with that because sometimes you're dealing with your own, I guess, monsters, your own, your inner challenges. And when you get a knock on your door saying, "You've got to fix this," or, "You've got to intervene on this, you're just like, oh, snap, I don't think I'm like in the mood to be mediating at this moment, you know?

I recently had a couple of residents get into an argument. It was getting out of hand. And I was awakened at three in the morning. I was really tired, too. I hadn't slept for the past weekend. I was like, "What's going on?" "Oh, this and this is happening; it's getting out of hand." And sometimes you're like, oh, I'm so stressed right now. This is the last thing that I want to be dealing with. But as your job, you have to. You can't say no. These people are relying on you. You've just got to do it. Yeah, it's really hard.

Self-Care

Vanderscoff: So in that setting, then, what are your practices and what are your resources as far as—and we can also extend this to other parts of your life—as far as self-care goes.

Solano: Self-care. (laughs) I haven't really done that in a long time. With self-care, the thing is that if I take a break, I feel like I'm not being productive and I feel guilty that I could have been done with something, readings or an essay instead of taking a break. So, I think to deal with stuff like that, I definitely stay in touch with my boss and I update him on everything, and we have conversations. And we try to find solutions that are going to best accommodate everyone. That helps a lot, knowing that I have my boss to help me. He does a really great job attending to us as his RAs, and meeting the needs of the students, the residents.

What *is* my self-care like? I like running. I started running the trails, upper campus. For some reason, running makes me happy. I don't know if there's some biological stuff that goes with that, you know? (laughs) But it makes me happy for some reason. It helps me control my breathing. It helps me really get myself together. (laughs). I think my mom was a runner when she was young.

Other than that, I do write short stories that I never finish, which is pretty interesting. I think a lot of the stories that I write are relatable to me, things that I have dealt with. I don't know, they just never have an ending, which is weird. But that's my type of self-care. I start writing stories.

I go out with my friends every now and then, but due to the level of workload that I have now, it's very limited. I don't really get to see my friends a lot, only on the weekends, maybe, if I have time and if I'm not on duty. I'm on duty this weekend. (laughs) That's where you have to just stay on campus, even though you want to go out for some food, but you can't, unless you order Domino's or something, but Domino's is bad. (laughter)

Vanderscoff: (laughs) So just a few things I want to be sure we get in here. We're at an hour and a half. How's your time doing, just so we can check in?

Solano: I think I'm good. We're good, yeah.

Vanderscoff: Okay. I wanted to be sure to talk about your role in leading the Practical Activism Conference, if you could say a little bit about that.

Practical Activism Conference

Solano: I became a part of Practical Activism when I was a first year. That was because after I took my social justice class, that's when the info sessions were happening. And it's something that starts in the spring quarter. We start meeting in the spring quarter, and then it goes on through summer and then the fall, half of fall quarter. So, it's work that I've done in high school; activism and being very involved. A lot of my high school experience is connected. So that's how I started; I started off just as a planner, a workshop planner.

And the second year that I did it, I took a lead in publicity. I was a publicity lead along with one of my other friends and we made sure that tabling was getting done, that we were publicizing the event and making sure that it was getting to radio stations, orgs, clubs, housing, everywhere. So I took a bit of a bigger role the second time I joined Practical Activism.

I guess not a lot of people wanted to lead the conference because it was a lot of work and commitment. I emailed the person, Wendy Baxter, who's in charge. And I was like, "I'm interested in perhaps leading the conference this year." And she gave me the opportunity to do so, along with two other of my friends, Jose and Sofia.

Vanderscoff: Maybe you could say a little bit, for the record, of what the conference is normally. And then we'll talk more.

Solano: So the conference, it's a day-long conference. It has ten workshops and they're all social justice-oriented, related. This past year we had a topic on transphobia, mental health, queerness and mental health, undocumented students, Islamophobia. Different topics like that. Very burning issues and recent stuff that is happening. The purpose of it is to make sure that as we bring in these resources, as we bring in people who have knowledge on these topics, to really make sure that their [message] is being sent out to our audience, and giving them the tools on how to get involved and what they can do to get involved in the community, and wherever they are, how they can be a part of the movement, or stuff like that.

And then, we usually have a keynote speaker and a spoken word artist. Every year it's been a very unique experience, with our keynote speakers and spoken word artists, they bring so much passion and valuable thoughts and advice that just awakens our urge to go on out and improve the communities we are a part of. A lot of the feedback that we get is very positive and I was very happy. It's a rewarding feeling, because it impacts a lot of people positively. People look forward to attend the year after. We do have booths that have other topics that we couldn't really cover within the ten main workshops. We try to cover as much as we can, recent issues that are happening. And as the years go by, there's always issues going on, or new topics that are on the news, stuff like that. We try to do the best we can to inform people, make people more aware of their surroundings. But a very rewarding experience.

Vanderscoff: And so who were your keynote and spoken word performers?

Solano: This past year was Eddy Zheng. And our spoken word artist was Terisa Siagatonu. Very great. They both really had deep things to say. Oh, it was amazing. I can live it again. (laughs) Eddy Zheng, he works with incarcerated youth. So, a lot of his messages were: what we see a lot is how people of color are targeted by the system, and how cops are always after people of color, and always stereotyping and stuff like that. He sent out a very motivational and clear message. A lot of people resonated with that.

And then, Terisa, her poetry—I even bought her book that day. I was like, this is so inspiring. It just touched the heart, literally. It was amazing. Very, I guess it just hits everyone, even though everyone comes from different backgrounds. She talked a lot on family and very personal experiences that one can relate and has flashbacks on that you're like oh yeah, I used to do that or my mother says that a lot.

Other years, there's also been, I think Darrick Smith was, for the first year I knew about Practical Activism. I don't remember the names of the other keynote speakers from the years before but also Angela Davis has been one of them. But for the one that I led this past year—those were the keynote and the spoken word artist.

Social Justice Course at College Ten

Vanderscoff: Another thing that is sort of parallel interest in engaging with perhaps some more themes, is your role in the social justice course. You mentioned you took a two-unit social justice course early on in your time here. But then more recently, I understand that you've been involved in teaching one.

Solano: Yeah. So, my involvement did start off with that class. And we did fundraising as a final project. It was collaborative. People worked to put together this big festival that we had. And yeah, I saw that it was student-taught, that students were teaching the class. So, I was like, oh my God, this is such a great opportunity. I never pictured myself teaching the class, but this is cool that students teach it.

And I remember there was an application process of teaching the class. I was like, oh, it's the same class that I took. I'm going to apply for it; I'm going to apply to teach the class. I interviewed and I got the position to teach, and I taught with my best friend, too. So, it was a good experience. It's not like a regular lecture with professors, where you've got to learn this for the midterm kind of thing. It was more a space for students to converse, a seminar, in a way.

We did cover identities. We covered the topic of privilege and oppression, and education, and feminism.

We had a lot of conversations and it's really interesting to see how students have different opinions and beliefs. It's just because of the way that they were raised, or brought up. It's really interesting to see that, and, as a whole class, have these conversations and exposing those people that really don't know the struggles of others. It's really rewarding to see how, at the end of the quarter, their mentality changes and they have a more open mind and understanding of the world. It's going to benefit them in the long run because they're more aware. They're not close-minded. We're not in the most liberal world now. (laughs) We're working on it. (laughter) I was like, no, wait, let me be careful what I say, not with this political climate.

But little things like that. Even though it was a class of twenty students—it wasn't a big lecture hall—but knowing that you created an impact in someone's life, and how one person can influence others and pass along what they've learned—that's very inspiring, and in the long run, that's going to be more effective. It's just going to keep being passed, like everything that we talked about.

But it was mostly conversation, activities. I remember one activity we did was: who built the tallest tower? We gave them basic school materials. And we gave them pens. And one envelope had tape, cups, pencils, erasers, highlighters. And then the second envelope had some of those materials, but they didn't have cups or tape. And then the third envelope probably only had two markers, a cup, and, I don't know, like one little scrap of tape. And everyone assumed that they had the same materials in the envelope. So, everyone was looking around and they were like, "Wait, they don't have tape. Or wait, they don't have this. We're going to win." So, people were getting that they, "Oh, we're going to win; this is great," even though there was no prize for that. But it was to get a point across. And we talked about privilege and the amount of resources a privileged person gets, as compared to a person that might be going through some

other stuff, maybe lack of education, or no access to health care, or extreme poverty compared to people who do have access to these resources. 'Activities like that get a point across and make the students think of the activity and make sure that they relate it to the real world and what's going on out there.

Multicultural Weekend at College Ten

Vanderscoff: Thank you for sharing that. So, I also wanted to talk about your experience being involved in the Multicultural Weekend, because you said that was really significant to you.

Solano: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: So I want to be sure that we have some space to discuss that.

Solano: Yeah. So, my roommate my first year attended Multicultural Weekend. I didn't attend it my first year. I committed my second year. And that's when I was still in that mentality where I was I was working a lot on myself. I had gotten in a fight with my former roommate. I was homesick, I was dealing with a lot. I was dealing with so much that quarter. And my friends weren't really fully there for me. It was very weird. It was such a weird year with my friends. So, I decided to go to a Multicultural Weekend, just to see how it was. I heard a lot of great things about it from my first-year roommate. I was like fine, I'll go.

And I went. And oh my God, it's just a space for you to really let out everything that you carry inside of you. It was another therapy session, kind of, in a way. We talked about identities. In high school, we would have these conversations but I'd never really experienced it. And now that I was experiencing them, it was a different way of having these conversations about privilege and oppression and different aspects of my identity that played a role in the way society sees me, what they expect of me.

I remember this one activity we did was crossing the line. They made us all form a line and the activity was based on statements. If that statement applied to you, you had to step over the line, and turn around and see the people who didn't cross the line. So, let's say, for example, "If you are from a low-income home, step forward." And everyone would move forward and turn around to those who didn't cross the line. All these facts were stated, facts that were very relatable, and facts that you lived through. It was a moment where you're just like yeah, I've gone through this, and I totally forgot that I went through this. And I haven't had the chance to let it out. It was a very intense and emotional activity. And it was a space to share your experiences, what is going on with you, and where you're at in society, and what can you do after the experience.

So, I remember I [had] started having the thought of messing up again and going back home. That's how homesick I was. I was like, I'm not even going to put in effort anymore. If I fail the class, I'm going to fail the class, and I'm just going to go back home. Like, whatever. That was one of my decisions. I guess that's something that I didn't mention in the beginning of this [interview] is I did have that thought again of dropping out my second year. And after sharing my experiences, I just never felt so motivated in my life. It's something that I felt like I tossed out, that was eating me up for several years. Yeah, it was very life-changing, very eye-opening. It motivated me to stay in school.

I think Multicultural Weekend is the reason why I stayed in Santa Cruz. Because after that, I knew that I had potential. I knew that I, as a human being, like every human being, has something to offer, and a purpose in life, which is what I got out of it. And everyone plays a role in this society. Seeing so many people on the same page from different backgrounds and identities, motivated me to do the work, get involved, keep on with my major.

The next year I applied to lead it, to lead Multicultural Weekend. And I did. It was a different experience being a part of it and leading it. But it still had the same effect because I did talk a lot

about the things that were overwhelming me the previous year. My dad passed away; that year it was very fresh. So, I guess I still carried a lot of my father and how his death really affects me. I talked a lot about that.

And again, you're given a space to voice anything that's making you feel sad or angry. People would just share. People perspectives change a lot in the way they see themselves, and I think it's mostly in a positive way. So, I guess the person that I am now, the way I see life now, is because of Multicultural Weekend. Yeah, a very, very deep retreat.

And it was in this very sheltered area in the Watsonville mountains. It was in this Buddhist retreat center. We stayed in these cabins and we did a bonfire. We did other fun activities, and bonding with the other participants. Even to this day, when we see people that were in the Multicultural Weekend, we're like, "Oh my gosh, how are you?" They're friendships and relationships that were very well-established in just a period of two days. People connected. It's a very unique experience. Even now, I tell my residents who are affiliated with College Ten, "Make sure that you take some time; apply to Multicultural Weekend and get the experience." Sometimes we're scared of going to things like this, but sometimes it's needed. You need these experiences. And no matter how much you might hate, or want to avoid talking about your feelings, or hiding stuff, or leaving things to the side— I just told them, "The feeling you get, the moment you step out of that area, it's very different." I've yet to hear a negative experience. A lot of my friends did it and it was very rewarding for them.

Vanderscoff: That's always a resident-facilitated event. Like you said, you led it.

Solano: I led it, yeah. I guess it's anyone who participated at least as a participant, and anyone who's interested to lead it the year after—you can apply. But it's just for College Ten students. It would be great if each college had their own version of Multicultural Weekend. That would be amazing. Colleges need these because not a lot of people get to talk about identities.

Vanderscoff: So we're just five minutes shy of two hours in here. I have one or two final wrap-up questions. Before we do that, though, I thought I'd ask whether you think there's something significant from your time here that we haven't covered yet. A lot of people have spoken about the impact of larger national events here, for example, the various political movements that have been happening, or the recent election, and the impact of what that might mean here. So, I'm just curious if there's anything you'd like to say regarding any of the impact of those sorts of things, before we move to a couple of closing questions that I have.

National Politics

Solano: Right. This election was very controversial and scary and whatnot. At least for me, it did bring a lot of fear, not only for myself, but for my family back at home, and my friends and their families. So, when I saw the whole protest the night of the election here in Santa Cruz, on campus, specifically, I felt a sense of unity, in a way, because I knew that there was a lot of us that felt the same way. I mean, UC Santa Cruz is a little bit more open-minded than a few other spaces, not entirely liberal, as people claim it is, but a little more open-minded. To see the [number] of students that I saw that night— I also participated in those protests. It was a very good space for me to heal, in a way. It was very nice to see that. And the protests that were organized, the marches that were organized afterwards—I think it's nice to see that. Despite the people in power right now, you have a community with you. I mean, I know I have my community back home and we're going to stick together, regardless, but I know that if I ever come back to Santa Cruz, that I can find that here as well, with some staff; with even friends from first-years to fourth-years— Some of us have the same mentality and the same ways of thinking and opinions.

I guess I'm also, in a way, happy that these movements are happening. I need to see more, because I feel like it started off well, and then it just kind of went down. I mean, even what's happening today, it's really scary, the decisions that the government is taking. It's concerning,

not only for us who live in the US, but people internationally. There's a lot that's going on. But [on] this campus many of the students are very open-minded about things and willing to stand up for themselves and speak up.

There's this whole stigma against millennials. It's like, "Oh, millennials, they're so bad. I hate them." Why do you hate them? "They're always creating chaos, blah, blah, blah." Whatever, it's not chaos. 'But knowing that people of my age, or around that age range, [are] not being scared any more of voicing out. And you don't have to look a certain way to have that. There's not only white people protesting, it's people from different intersectionalities—black folks, Latinx folks, queer folks, people with disabilities, everyone coming together and voicing out their thoughts and fears. It's really nice to see that.

But I think there is still more work to be done on campus. Because that night I did see a few people who were not the friendliest. I mean, it's everywhere, I guess. You have people like that everywhere. They can be racist or homophobic, things like that. But is this something that can be solved? I don't know. Maybe. I think a lot of the movements we do now is so that someday people won't have to go through this anymore. And that's going to take a long time. A very long time, hundreds of years, maybe thousands, I don't know. But it's a start. I feel like a lot of what we're doing now, it's moving. It will create a bigger impact someday, and then it just moves on from there.

Vanderscoff: So if you feel like you're a part of this generation which is saying things both about themselves and the things they're afraid of. Could you say a little bit about what that means, maybe connecting some of the themes that we've been talking about this whole time, in terms of your life. Say what that means for you personally, to be in this place now, almost finished with your college education, and kind of moving on to the next chapter and all that, what it means to speak in that way.

Solano: I did not speak up for myself. Even when I used to get bullied in school, I wouldn't fight back. And now I feel like I can't stay quiet. That's one thing that I learned to do here at Santa Cruz that I'm going to definitely take back home, or wherever I end up, is literally making sure that I'm never silenced. Whatever is going on, I will voice out. Or even whoever I work with in the future, making sure that I have these types of conversations that I had here. Because it's a privilege having these conversations here on campus. Back home, the only time we would talk about this is if you were involved in a club. Other than that, you wouldn't talk about this in normal day school, or with your family, because your family doesn't, or at least, my family doesn't understand this. I try to have conversations with them, but they're just like, "Yeah, that's how life is, like whatever. It's always been like that." But it's like, "Mom, no, there's things that could be done. You can stand up for yourself now. No one's going to shut you—yeah, you might get shut down, but you keep on fighting for yourself, and you keep fighting. That's the point. Keep fighting." But at least for me, that's one of the things.

I'm very into the *Walking Dead*, too. I don't know if you watch that.

Vanderscoff: No. Should I?

Solano: Recently this season, one of the priests that comes out there, I don't know if it's cliché, but I was like whoa, did he really just say that? He was like, "Anything is possible while the heart is still beating." So, I was just like, that was deep. (laughs) And it stuck a lot with me. I was like, that's so true, as long as you're alive, you can definitely just do anything, you know? Like, if you want to help someone out, help someone out to the best of your ability and however you can. I think what I've learned as a child, what I've learned through high school, what I've learned here at UC Santa Cruz, especially here at Santa Cruz, I'm definitely taking a lot of, I don't know, just passion in working with people. And making sure people don't have so much fear. And if they have fear, to transform that fear into something else, whether it be in forms of

activism, expression through art, I don't know. Just something. Whatever they like to do. We are in a different time, and in a time where we have the ability to fight back.

Final Reflections

Vanderscoff: So my final question then, pulling some of these different things together that you've been sharing. You're graduating soon. Any thoughts about what might be coming next, or what you're looking at ahead of you now?

Solano: Yeah. (laughs) I'm actually walking this spring. I'm graduating in the summer, and that's because I need one more outside course, and I'm doing it abroad. I'm going to India over the summer.

Vanderscoff: Oh. Where?

Solano: Odisha, Centurion University of Technology. So that's my plan right after I graduate, or walk the stage. Go to India, do some field study there, and then that's how I'll finish my undergrad career. (laughs)

And after that, I hope to find a job. I'm looking in areas where I get to work with youth, specifically at-risk youth. I see a lot of my peers from high school, how they had a lot of potential, but just things got in the way. And they're not doing so well. I really want to go back to my community and help my people out. Because I didn't have any vision. I never envisioned myself here, graduating. And now I'm graduating. It wasn't easy. It was definitely challenging. It's a lot of late nights, staying up. Again, the sacrifices of leaving home, not spending time with your family, especially my little brother, who keeps growing up. Four years is a lot. I would only see him holidays and stuff. I didn't even know he could sing. Apparently, he's auditioning for something through the school district. I'm like, I didn't know this. I feel so bad.

My plan is also spending more time with my family, and reconnecting, and making sure we're all on the same page because my family still needs a little bit of work done in terms of open-mindedness and accepting certain groups. So that's my goal after: working with my family; working with youth. That will be my gap year, or two years that I might take off. And then apply for grad school. I want to go to USC, but you know, it's wherever I find a program that's going to be of my interest and something that I'll be passionate about.

Vanderscoff: Any idea of what that might be?

Solano: I'm trying to do social work. But I really want to continue my research in the education field or queer identity. And then in the long run, just be happy. (laughter) Be satisfied with what I've done. Because I'm definitely in a different position and place than what I was fifteen, twenty years ago. Yeah, very different. It's so weird the way life works. Sometimes you see the end to things and it takes time to get out of certain situations, but I guess that's where my optimism comes from. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: Beautiful. Unless there's anything else you'd like to say in closing?

Solano: I don't think so. Is there anything that I missed? I know it was a lot.

Vanderscoff: No. I think we hit most of my notes. I'd like to thank you so much for coming here and sharing your story and about all the studies and the work that you've been doing, and to thank you for all that.

Solano: Well, thank you for this opportunity. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: We'll close off this record.

Jess Whatcott

At the time of her interview, Jess Whatcott was a fourth-year graduate student in politics with a designated emphasis in feminist studies and critical race and ethnic studies. She served as president of the Graduate Student Association (GSA). Whatcott grew up in Utah and earned her undergraduate degree and a Master's at California State University, Humboldt. Before she came to UCSC, Whatcott worked as adjunct faculty and has been a TA at UC Santa Cruz. She is a first-generation college student.

Vanderscoff: So, it's Thursday, April 13, 2017, and this is Cameron Vanderscoff here for the Student Interviews oral history project we're doing at UC Santa Cruz. The way we've been asking our narrators to start out this project is just to introduce yourself, identify yourself in whatever words you like, and then if you'd just start by saying a little bit about your background.

Early Background

Whatcott: Okay. My name is Jess Whatcott. I'm currently a fourth-year graduate student here at UC Santa Cruz in the Politics Department. They have a special program here, it's kind of like a minor, the equivalent of a minor for undergrads, what's called a designated emphasis. So, I have designated emphases in feminist studies and critical race and ethnic studies.

I suppose I'll talk more about my work later. But I feel like I've had many lives before I came here to Santa Cruz. Let me try to sum up this as briefly as possible. I grew up in Utah. (laughs) Mostly. And moved to California when I was nineteen. And I lived in Humboldt County for eleven years. I got my undergrad degree there. I worked for nonprofits for several years. Then I went back to school and got a master's degree and I started teaching at the university there as an adjunct. The other faculty there are a very, very collaborative group and they really encouraged me to go back and get my PhD. So, they really supported me in coming here. I'm a first-generation college student, didn't really know what I was getting into. Steep learning curve. (laughter) I guess that's a good background on me.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, so in walking through that, so for example, we had one person who related their upbringing to some of the material that they now study. Someone who was a sociology major, for example, related it to their upbringing being in an urban neighborhood that was being gentrified, and kind of connected those interests. And so, reviewing your biography before you came here, could you talk a little bit about your educational background and then connect that to anything biographically in any of these places that might be germane to understanding why *you* wound up coming *here*, ultimately, doing what you're doing, if that makes sense.

Whatcott: Okay, yes. It's not very linear—it's not a linear story. Due to some family dynamics in my family, school was a real refuge for me. I always loved school and I loved my teachers and I was always very curious about the world. I loved reading. I was an avid reader. I devoured all the books in my house. And then my mom would take me to the library and I would get giant stacks of books. So, I always loved reading. Reading was a window for me to what else was out there in the world. The more I read, the more curious and interested I became about the world.

In high school, I was very excited about college. I say I'm a first-generation college student, but my mom, when I was in middle school, did attend a community college and got a certificate in radiology technology, and sometimes I had to go with her to school (laughs) when I didn't have afterschool care or whatever. So that was a big inspiration to me, too, to pursue higher education.

I wanted to be a teacher when I was in high school because I loved being in the school environment. I thought, well if I can't be a student forever, I can be a teacher. I can continue to learn with people. So that put me on the trajectory of being in school and being part of a campus community.

I've always been kind of like a sensitive soul and really feel for the plight of others. I was raised in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Most people know them as the Mormons. We were taught to serve others; that's just part of life. So I always grew up doing service projects. So I was really sensitive to the plight of others and just immediately, even in high school, started throwing myself into social justice work and environmental justice causes. That was my authentic self: giving to others and being part of the struggle to make the world a better place. So that's maybe the vaguer, short answer of how I ended up here.

Vanderscoff: So you come out to California as opposed to, is this Salt Lake City, or is it another city or is it rural Utah?

Whatcott: I grew up in a suburb of Salt Lake City, in Kearns, Utah. It's actually one of the more ethnically diverse areas in Salt Lake. I grew up with a lot of Pacific Islander neighbors and people from Southeast Asia. I went to school in Utah for one year at Utah State University. There's a lot of things I enjoyed about that school—the outdoors, I worked for the newspaper there. I didn't really feel like it was the school for me. I had some good teachers, but I didn't—I don't know, I didn't feel like it was a good fit for me.

Actually, my dance teacher told me about Humboldt State University. She had gone on vacation to Redwood National Park. And I sort of just packed up everything in my car and I drove out there and transferred to that school. I actually didn't know much about California. Humboldt is a rural area. The biggest town is 35,000 people. But it's much more rural. It's cut off. There's a very small airport that doesn't fly out when there's bad weather and those kinds of things. So, it was a very different kind of experience. But I loved it there.

Vanderscoff: I have looked a little bit at your CV. So, when you were there you were doing academic work but you were also doing community organizing work.

Whatcott: Yes.

Vanderscoff: So maybe you could talk about those two areas and then where they intersected as a way of foregrounding coming to UCSC.

Whatcott: Yes. I was involved in many projects there but I'll pick out two stand that out to me. One was that I attended a rally outside of Pelican Bay State Prison, which is in Crescent City, which is the furthest northwest corner of California you can get. I got very interested in prison, what was happening inside of prisons. I also went on a tour. 'So, I went to a rally and then later got invited to go on a tour of the security housing unit there. It was very eye-opening. It's basically a dungeon. The guards have to draw arrows on the walls to tell them where the exits were because it's just this big concrete—it feels like a bunker. And the people who are housed there don't ever get to go outside. They live in their cells twenty-three hours a day. The only human contact they ever get is violence, if they're being forcibly extracted from their cell. So, it was a very eye-opening experience to see the kinds of conditions that people were living in. And I ended up getting involved in educating people about the prison system and doing some human rights oversight work of Pelican Bay State Prison. I did that for eight years. That's driven my continued interest in telling people what life is like behind bars for people. So

currently, my dissertational research is on early twentieth century incarceration in California of women and girls. So, there's a deep commitment to trying to abolish our prison system.

The other project that I got involved in in Humboldt was totally different. It was running a girls' camp for middle school girls, which I did for nine years. That's been an amazing experience. It was a wonderful group of women who run and organize the camp. And it's a delightful place that takes place out in the middle of nowhere. And I did a number of things, ranging from unclogging toilets to teaching self-defense classes. So, it's a very hands-on experience. I loved that program as well.

Coming to UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: So that's great to hear some of that context. And so, I'm curious about how you heard about UC Santa Cruz. If you could just walk us through the story of how you heard about Santa Cruz, came to apply, and then ultimately came here.

Whatcott: Okay. I heard about UC Santa Cruz because I'm a huge fan of Angela Davis. So, I guess there's a connection there, in that I've read all of her work on prisons.

Vanderscoff: Are Prisons Obsolete?

Whatcott: Exactly. And she came to Humboldt State University twice. I didn't get to meet her personally, but I got to be in a couple of smaller group settings with her. And not only do I really value everything that she's contributed to the field of, well some people call it critical prison studies, but I appreciated her wisdom about community organizing in general, and being in solidarity with people. So that's why I first heard about UC Santa Cruz.

So, when I was considering applying, I knew that she was professor emeritus here, and looked into it, and then began to realize that many other people whose work I admired, including Donna Haraway, Neferti Tadiar, Gloria Anzaldúa— some folks who are not with us at UCSC

anymore, or not with us on this plane anymore, had taught here or been grad students here. So, it seemed like a really rich intellectual space. So that is why I applied. I guess I'll say—back to the first-generation college student thing—I didn't really know what I was doing. But my program, I guess, saw something in me and I ended up being awarded a fellowship to come here. So, I came.

Vanderscoff: The Cota-Robles.

Whatcott: Yeah, I was awarded the Cota-Robles Fellowship, which is one of the best funding best funding packages you can get. The purpose of it is to recruit students who overcome obstacles to be graduate students and who are committed to research and scholarship and teaching that brings diversity to their fields, and to the university. So, I came here.

Vanderscoff: Great. We'll explore the reasons why you got that award, and then what you've done with that in terms of your studies here in a little bit. But first, I'm just curious if you could walk us through—you had this set of expectations, you said, built up about this place because of Neferti Tadiar, Gloria Anzaldúa, Angela Davis—

Whatcott: Yes. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: —and all of these luminaries, right? So, I'm curious, then, intellectually, but also in any other way you really want to comment, what the reality was that you found here relative to where you'd been before, be that Humboldt or prior.

Whatcott: Sure. Okay, I'll start with the positive. The positive was that I have found this place to be very intellectually stimulating. I've taken some brilliant classes from amazing people who've introduced me to new works. Totally blown my mind. Amazing speakers come through here all the time. I've gotten to see almost everyone on my academic bucket list. (laughs) So I feel I've grown intellectually a lot. And in that way, UCSC was a good choice for me.

On the flipside, I would say the negative side is I didn't really have very much support when I came here. And I guess that's what I mean when I say I didn't know what I was doing is that I didn't know that you were supposed to find mentors and advisors before you came to a place. I just assumed I would find them when I came. So, the first three years I was here were very difficult in securing good mentors. I have an amazing dissertation committee now but it was kind of an arduous road to bring that team together. There were times that I thought I was going to have to drop out of school, honestly, because I didn't have the support that I needed.

I think that's something that we talked about at the GSA, the Graduate Student Association: the Cota-Robles Fellowship is designed to bring people who may not have as many resources for navigating graduate school, to graduate school and then there's no support when we get here. Because we don't TA; we don't serve as teaching assistants the first year. We're just funded. So, then everything really hinges on how much time your first-year advisor wants to give you and a lot of the first-year advisors seem to be really hands-off, you know? They don't want to bother you or micromanage you, but you're just sort of floundering. So that's something that we've talked about—how could we improve that program for Cota-Robles students.

Vanderscoff: That's great. And we're going to talk a lot about your work with the GSA a little later on in this session. So, if you can connect those observations to events in those first two years; if you can think about, be they specific courses that you were taking, seminars, talks, independent study, whatever it was—if you could connect that observation that you just made to particular experiences you had as far as like the academic side of things.

Whatcott: Oh, okay. The things I found stimulating?

Vanderscoff: Yeah, exactly. Connecting that to anecdotes.

Whatcott: Well, one of the first classes I took here was from Bettina Aptheker in the Feminist Studies Department. I took her feminist pedagogies class. I really appreciate the way that

Bettina is a very approachable person. She didn't intimidate me like a lot of other famous feminist academics. She was very approachable. She was very down to earth. And she was very committed to giving us practical skills for teaching in the classroom, which is not, surprisingly, something that they give you a lot of tools for at the university. They give you very strenuous intellectual training but they don't necessarily teach you how to teach, which is what many graduate students will go on to do afterwards. So, I appreciated Bettina's commitment to that.

And then the other great thing about that class was I met a lot of other really great friends, people across the university, people who I still consider friends today, and will hopefully keep in touch with after we leave. So that introduced me to a network of other people with similar social justice commitments and feminist visions for the world. So that was really a valuable part of that class.

On the more academic side of things, I took two courses from the person who's my advisor now, Dean Mathiowetz, in politics, a couple of classes that I maybe wouldn't have signed up for on my own. But I wanted to study with Dean, so I took his class *Critical Classical Political Economy*. I'm very interdisciplinary, so I don't always give very much time to the classic political science cannon. So, I appreciated that effort to give me a sit-down with Adam Smith and some older political economy writers, but to approach it from a critical, fresh perspective.

Dean won an award, I think, last year, for his teaching. I can't remember the name of the award, but it was a campus award for excellent teachers. So, I think that just goes to show how thoughtful he is about his teaching.

Living off Campus

Vanderscoff: In your first year here, are you living in Santa Cruz, on or off campus? Where are you in relationship to the campus?

Whatcott: I didn't want to spend a lot of money on housing and I didn't have a lot of money. I grew up in the punk scene and the activist scene, and so I ended up moving into what I would call a punk house with eight other people near downtown Santa Cruz. There were no other students there; there were a couple of people who had gone to UCSC as undergrads. But everyone was doing a variety of things: they were teaching; a couple of people worked at a sauerkraut factory in town. (laughs) Yeah, Farmhouse Cultures—it's across the country. It was good to be with people who were doing something different with their lives, so I wasn't so completely tunnel vision on being a student.

Vanderscoff: So if you have that to balance you out as a human, (laughter) and then you're also not in the position where you're doing TAships in your first year—by the nature of your fellowship, I'm curious where the key areas of education were happening for you, and where you were, in fact, forming connections with faculty, but then with your peers, if you're not in a residential situation with them—how you started to locate yourself at UC Santa Cruz.

Whatcott: Yeah. The other thing that happened the first year was that my partner did not live here and lived out of town. I was actually visiting a lot to visit them. And I was exploring the city of Santa Cruz. There is a very small queer community, so I was going to things, like there was Queeraoke, started by a professor on campus. (laughs) So I did go to things like that. And there was a person who was further along in my program who would insist on picking me up really late Thursday nights to go to the one queer dance night in town. It's at the Blue, I always forget, you know how there's the Blue Lounge and the Blue Lagoon. It's one of those.

Vanderscoff: It's the Blue Lagoon.

Whatcott: The one on Seabright.

Vanderscoff: Oh yeah, there's one up there, the Rainbow Room, when I was here, yeah. (laughs)

Whatcott: So we went to that sometimes. I was trying to make friends. I did make friends with a lot of people in that one class and hung out with a lot of those people. And I was obviously taking courses, which were very stimulating. I had a lot of time to devote to reading and writing, which is really living the life of the mind. It's every grad student's dream—we just get to read and write all the time. And I went to pretty much every single speaker I could go to, so I was really trying to throw myself in there.

The second year, I did work as a teaching assistant, so I was on campus more. But I also, just to be perfectly frank, I started having mental health and physical health issues that year because that was my hardest year. I was very stressed out, to be blunt, and not handling it very well. And I do have a chronic health condition that flared up. So that was a really difficult year.

And then my third year, I finally secured a good advisor and I was pulling together my qualifying exam committee. And my partner moved down to the Bay Area, and I actually moved over the hill to the East Bay and started commuting. That was a better fit for me but it meant that I wasn't on campus as much.

I joined the GSA that year and that was maybe the one thing that was really tying me to the campus.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, that's what I'm curious about. If you look, then, from your first to your third year, and if you look at your first year as a place where you were trying to get traction, essentially—and that was in terms of your academic work, but then you're also talking about mental and physical health. I'm curious, then, about what practices of self-care and/or what resources there were that carried you through to year two and then to year three and to this more positive arrangement, what you described as the more positive situation that you're in now, commuting from the East Bay.

Whatcott: Yeah, totally. I mean, just really practically, I had to work closely with my doctor at the Student Health Center, who's a great doctor. And I started going to counseling, or therapy regularly. That's not something that—no one in my family does that kind of thing. (laughs) So people had to talk me into it. But that was very helpful. And there's this thing on campus called Fit Life, which are these drop-in exercise classes. I had trained in kickboxing before I came here but I hadn't found another place to train. I found a really cool teacher in the Fit Life program, so I started training again and that was really great for me. It was more like an aerobic cardio version of kickboxing, but it was just great to be with other people exercising. I also took a swimming class. So, I did try to give myself permission to just be in my body and do something really physical. That was very helpful.

Graduate Student in Politics

Vanderscoff: And so then on the academic side of things, did you come in with your emphases set? Or is that something that developed here, within politics?

Whatcott: Well, in my undergrad I studied both politics and women's studies, as it's called there. And so, I knew that I was interested in both fields. The year that I came was the first year that the school offered a PhD in feminist studies. I wasn't quite sure about it. No one had gone through it before, so I didn't know if it was a good idea to go that route. I just figured I would go the politics route and I knew about the designated emphasis. So that was my plan.

The program that I taught in at Humboldt State before I came here was called Critical Race, Gender and Sexuality Studies. It is an interdisciplinary department and I taught in each of those fields. UCSC didn't have an ethnic studies program until, I think, three years ago. So it was after I came. I didn't realize when I came that they had been agitating for an ethnic studies program for like forty years.

Vanderscoff: A long time.

Whatcott: The first year that I was here, some students were organizing a critical race and ethnic studies symposium to celebrate the launch of the program. I got involved in that group and helped organize that event. That was another really good place to find community, meet people with similar intellectual and social justice commitments. I think the symposium was amazing. It happened, I guess that was 2015? Yeah, 2014, 2015, I can't remember now. But it was a great event.

I just like to get involved in things. (laughs) And I got involved in that. I didn't declare that designated emphasis until earlier this year, actually. But I'd been involved in the student working group. I just decided to go for it.

Vanderscoff: And so, as far as these designated emphases, does that mean then you have to satisfy certain course requirements? Or does this mean your dissertation in some way has to acknowledge—I mean, how does that actually work out in terms of your benchmarks as a normative progress?

Whatcott: Each of the departments set their own requirements. But generally, you have to take four classes with one of the professors that's affiliated with the program and with content in the subject matter. So that doesn't seem like a lot, but most grad students don't take more than twelve classes, total. So, it's a good chunk of the classes that they take. And someone on your committee needs to be affiliated with the program. And either part of your dissertation has to substantively address the content, or you have to write another major piece of writing that does. It differs with each program. And some of them want you to TA for one of their courses, too. But that's sort of changed with feminist studies having their own PhD students. They've taken away that requirement, because they need to give their TAships to their own PhD students.

Vanderscoff: And so I think your emphases speak to this as well, but you mentioned that you have an interest in interdisciplinary work and less in the classic disciplinary canon.

Whatcott: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: And so I'm curious, if you can connect this to either particular courses that you're in, or particular experiences you've had with advising, and the way in which your work has been counseled or steered one way or another, how that process has gone for you, what sort of flexibility there has been for that sort of interdisciplinary work and disciplinary border crossings? And then fitting that in specifically under the aegis of politics.

Whatcott: Okay. One of the reasons I was interested in politics at UCSC is because it has a historical commitment to interdisciplinary scholarship. So, looking at the work of some of the graduates of the program, many of them have done this path of studying in politics, but doing the feminist studies designated emphasis. And so, I thought that it would be welcome in the program.

I think that there's been a bit of transition in my department. There are many people are still committed to that kind of work but other people are more interested in trying to fit into more traditional political science fields of scholarship. We're all very close, the people in my cohort. Some of the people are more interested in doing things like going to the American Political Science Association conference, which I would never think of to do. (laughs) I'm going to this other random thing in South Carolina, or whatever. So, there are trajectories—you can do more traditional things and then, if you want to be more interdisciplinary, there are faculty that will support you in doing that, and there are these mechanisms like the designated emphases. You're totally welcome to take all kinds of classes outside the department. I don't know if this is standard on every campus, but here you're supposed to have at least one person on your committee that's outside of your department, a faculty member. So, you're sort of encouraged to take some classes outside and make a connection with someone who can bring different insight into your project. So, there're some mechanisms like that that encourage it.

But then in other ways, you kind of have to find your own way. Like you have to figure out what—you're going to get the emails about the American Political Science Association conference, but if you don't want to go to that, then you have to do a bit of your own research to see what other conferences are out there that might be a better fit for me, that are interesting to me in my work. So, you have to do a little bit more reaching out, I think.

Vanderscoff: Are there frameworks of support for doing that? Or is this a place that if you're going an interdisciplinary course within your particular department, that then requires self-directed learning? I'm curious about what kind of a framework there is here for that, and then to what extent that's sort of individualized—

Whatcott: I think it's pretty self-directed. If you want to do it, you will be supported. You'll find support for that, but it's not going to be handed to you at all.

Vanderscoff: So you mentioned that you didn't have TAships in the first year. Is this something that changes in later years, then? What are the terms of the Cota-Robles Fellowship?

Whatcott: The Cota-Robles provides you with three years of funding support. And then the other two years, your department is supposed to provide. That varies on which kind of department you're in. If you're in one of the sciences, you may be working at a lab for those two years. If you're in social sciences, humanities, or arts, then you're more likely to be teaching for those two years, although not exclusively. I did it a bit differently, but for most people, it's every other year. So, every other year you would have funding. And then in the odd years, you would have to work for your department. But most people, it takes them at least six years to finish their work, so grad students with Cota Robles fellowships need to apply for six-year fellowships, or things like that.

Teaching Assistant

Vanderscoff: And so for you personally, then, have you been following this alternating year TA model? Or if and when have you been TAing, essentially?

Whatcott: Yeah. I TA'd my second year. And then I TA'd one of the summers. And I actually TA'd this last quarter, because the feminist studies department needed someone to fill in for the *Women and the Law* class with Professor Gina Dent and I really wanted to be part of that class, so I just went for it. And it was a great experience.

Vanderscoff: So I'd very much like to talk about some of these TAships as a way of A, reflecting on your own teaching, but then also on interacting with the undergraduate student body here at UCSC. So if you could share some stories about some of your early TAship experience, what sort of framework you were given, or background or training you were given?

Whatcott: Oh, yeah. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: And then we'll talk about translating that into the classroom.

Whatcott: Okay. Well, keep in mind that I had already been teaching my own classes for two years and my previous university had a really strong commitment to pedagogical practices. So I have been part of, for example, a faculty fellowship about working with LGBTQ students. It was a semester-long fellowship where I met with other faculty and we talked about the unique needs of that population of students and how we could modify our pedagogy—not only our pedagogy, but things like instead of taking the roll the first day in class, somehow letting students let you know what their preferred name is, letting them introduce themselves and checking them off the roster some way else. Because then students don't have to be outed the first day as having a name, or using a name that doesn't match the one on the roster. Those kinds of things.

So, I had come in with lots of training like that. And then my department offered a TA training several times. And I took that pedagogy class from Bettina and I learned a lot in that class. It was pretty self-directed, I would say. I think a lot of people kind of have to learn by doing. And each of the professors has their own—they're either really hands-on, or hands-off, or somewhere in between. So, each time that you TA a class, you kind of have to start over because you have to figure out what kind of style does this professor have? What do they want me to do in section? How do they want me to grade the papers? That's how I feel, anyway. You sort of have to start over each time and get a sense for that, and then go forward.

Vanderscoff: And so insofar as whatever framework you were getting on TAing here at Santa Cruz, if you compare it to that which you received at Humboldt, I'm curious what seemed to distinguish it, if the priorities seemed to be the same. I mean, you mentioned at Humboldt that there was a whole module focusing on LGBTQ students.

Whatcott: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: So I'm curious if you could kind of compare those.

Whatcott: I've heard people call this the DIY campus, and it's not necessarily a positive thing. Like, for example, at my previous university, the Disability Resource Center had enough resources that they could proctor every exam for every student who needed an accommodation. So, in that case, I would just send my exam over to the DRC; they would contact the student and schedule a time to proctor their exam. I was very surprised when I came here and I found out that TAs were supposed to somehow proctor the exams for students and the resources aren't really there to provide the real accommodations that students need. I proctored an exam in this room where there was a water cooler and people kept trying to walk in and get water. And I was like, "You can't, this student is supposed to have complete isolation." (laughter) So just like things like that. At my previous university, I knew the librarian for my department and would contact her and she would check out films or books for me and just have them sent over

to my office. So, there was a lot more structured support, I would say, for teaching there. So, I was surprised at having to learn how to navigate and get things together for classes was a bit annoying.

What I *do* like about teaching at UCSC is that it's not—it's exactly the same thing—it's not quite as structured. I've also taught at a community college before. And I had to send them copies of my exams before I administered them, and they had to be on file. And I had to work with other professors who were teaching another section of the same class I was teaching, so that we were teaching similar material across each section. It was very much more structured. I do appreciate that there's much more freedom here, I guess because it's a university—more intellectual freedom and more freedom to give individualized attention to each student. There's less concern with making sure that each person's grade is 100 percent fair compared to another student's grade. You can give a student a grade based on their particular performance in a class and how they've improved and the work that they've put in a course. So it's less standardized and I appreciate that.

Vanderscoff: So if you think about this reputation of UCSC being like this DIY campus in the larger sort of grad student scene, like at other institutions—it may be that you've already answered this question, but I thought I'd just check in—are there other clear things that you would attribute that to, in your own experience?

Whatcott: What do you mean? That DIY ethic?

Vanderscoff: Well, you said it's known as the DIY ethic place. Is that primarily regarding this issue of pedagogy, when it comes to the courses, in both positive and negative senses? Or do you think that connects to other parts of your grad student experience here, this DIY reputation? Where does that come from, basically, is what I'm saying?

Whatcott: Yes, it's a curse and a blessing to be so unstructured. I know a lot of other universities, for example, where for graduate students every class that you take the first year is already set in stone. We don't have that here. That's a blessing, in that you can pick something that you want to take. It's a curse in that you have to find something that you want to take and it's a bit more confusing. Maybe you have to set up an independent study to set up what you want to study. I think that's true for teaching. It's a similar dynamic. It's a blessing and a curse.

Disability Issues

Vanderscoff: And then, when it comes to, say, the particular area of accommodations, I was actually just speaking with a student narrator here, speaking very eloquently about a push for universal design—

Whatcott: Yes.

Vanderscoff: —in materials. And so I'm curious what sort of framework you're given on that. And then your own approach to that, to the question of universal design around materials, and then how you go about doing accommodations in general in a class.

Whatcott: Oh, yes. I would say that we receive very little structure around universal design. I draw on disability studies in my work, so I'm very interested in access issues. People also call this campus a very ableist campus in the sense that traversing it is very difficult. And sometimes you're waiting on, students are waiting on the DRC vans for a while. Or, I actually know a professor on campus who was told that the DRC vans had to accommodate students first. And while I understand the logic behind that, I'm like, well how is this person supposed to get to their class to teach? There have also been elevators on campus that have been out of order for years or months. And those are the buildings that they're supposed to teach in and they can't access all the floors of the buildings. I see the DRC out there trying to communicate to people how important access issues are but I don't think that they have the resources, really, to

fully implement universal access. Right now, it's completely voluntarily. It seems to me if you want to have universal design in your course, it's up to you if you're interested in that issue. But I have had professors ask me to show films that are not captioned. That's just not something that would cross their mind. Or professors have these readers that you can buy at the bookstore, these copy packets. But if someone uses an onscreen reader, how are they supposed to use the material? They don't have digital access to it—all these things that I think people just don't think about might be prohibiting someone from accessing a class, or being able to participate fully.

Vanderscoff: And so for you as an educator in this situation, but then also being in the unusual dual role of being an intermediary with the faculty member who is helping the class, what sort of flexibility and methods have you found as far as being able to deploy methods that you think, personally, are important—as an educator, as a student, as somebody who is studying these areas.

Whatcott: They just started a Center for Innovations in Teaching and Learning.[30] I think that we need to have faculty buy-in and grad student buy-in to those, and that they need to have more opportunities for people to learn about these issues and shift their practices. I imagine that most people, once they become aware that certain things are making it difficult for some students in their classes to perform their best, would make changes if they knew what to do, how to make the changes.

We could do things like have—I don't even know if they have them, I don't think they do—like a convocation, like many other universities have a convocation at the beginning of the year. It's like an in-service day for faculty, where they get to attend workshops and learn about different things. So that would be a workshop on universal design. Or a workshop on talking about racism in the sciences. And they can go learn things like that together. I know many other

[30] https://news.ucsc.edu/2016/04/lee-keynote.html

universities have book circles where faculty get together and read a book together. I mean, there's those kinds of things that we could do to have ongoing learning about learning.

Vanderscoff: Great. So, there's two final questions on that topic before we start talking about your own role at the GSA and things like that. And one of them is, when I was here, narrative evaluations were still mandatory and often they were written up by grad students when there were sections. And then my understanding is that now they're optional. An interest of this project is checking in as to what's become of them now that they've become optional. So I'm curious what's been communicated to you as a TA who is grading and assessing people about that tool, whether there's been any conversation about that. And if so, whether that's something that's in use in any way.

Whatcott: The way it was communicated to me is that if a student wants a narrative evaluation, they have to request one. I haven't had a student request one from me. As graduate students, we don't get grades. We are supposed to get narrative evaluations in all of our core classes. So out of the thirteen, fourteen classes I took, I think I got four evaluations back. So I don't think that it's even happening at a grad level very regularly.

Trigger Warnings

Vanderscoff: And one question on this topic that I did want to ask you, it's getting a little bit ahead to themes about larger national or even international conversations. But there's been a large national conversation about adding features to classes such as trigger warnings, and changing the way in which the material is presented, or introduced, or contextualized, with pedagogical tools. And it's often sort of sensationalized, you know—

Whatcott: Yeah. (laughter)

Vanderscoff: —in these very dramatic pieces in *The Atlantic* and stuff like that.[31]

Whatcott: Totally, yeah. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: Anyway, so I'm just curious for you what the conversation has been on that, for you, personally, with your peers, and then within the sections that you're teaching as well.

Whatcott: I am very interested in that issue. I haven't really talked about it with very many people here, to be honest. Most of the courses I teach—most of the time, they're about race, gender, sexuality, colonialism, imperialism, so they include analysis of violence. The *Women and the Law* class that I just TA'd had a whole unit on domestic violence, for example. So, I tend to do two things—one is that I forewarn students at the beginning of the quarter that we're going to be talking about difficult material, that I'm not going to be able to really give them a trigger warning every time they might be triggered. What I know about trauma is that you can't always know when you're going to be triggered and so it's actually impossible for me to do that for everyone.

But the second thing that I do is that I let people know that I support them if they need to get up and leave the class. I ask them if they're feeling in crisis to let someone know where they're going at the very least, if possible, so they're not just going off by themselves. But that's my policy in general in the classroom; I'm a very wiggly person and I can't even sit still for three hours, so if people need to eat or drink or use the restroom, it doesn't bother me at all. I know it bothers many professors, but it doesn't bother me. And so, I give people permission to take care of their own needs. That's how I tend to handle the trigger warning topic.

Vanderscoff: And in practice, how have you found that to play out in your sections?

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[31] https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/09/the-coddling-of-the-american-mind/399356/

Whatcott: I think it's worked fine. Unfortunately, I've definitely had students who stopped coming to class. I want to honor them for their bravery for signing up for the class in the first place. Sometimes it's not going to work for them. I think that's fine. They need to make that decision for themselves.

But on the other hand, you can't always tell what's going on with someone just by looking at their outwards appearance. I once had a student who the whole week that we talked about sexualized violence, was sitting there with their headphones in (laughs) and not looking at me. And I was like, wow, this must be a really hard topic for this person and just honor that this is the way that they can be here right now. At the end of the semester—this is teaching at another university—they came up to me and revealed that they had actually been paying attention the whole time but that was how they handled it, was listening simultaneously listening to quiet music and paying attention. They had learned a lot in that section of class and they wanted to let me know. So, I was like well, okay. You can't tell by looking at people sometimes. This is how some people be present.

Vanderscoff: Hmm. But you mentioned that conversations around pedagogical tools, like trigger warnings, when it comes to considering how to address varying student experiences of trauma and vulnerability in the classroom, that conversation hasn't been happening as much in between you and your peers, or faculty?

Whatcott: Oh, no. Not at all. I think it was a question when I was in pedagogy class with Bettina but I would say that like many of the other grad students in my department are very adverse to—they don't want to deal with student trauma. I have a background in—I did my master's research on domestic violence and sexualized violence. I've organized around these issues a long time. I've worked as a social worker. I have a lot of comfort with talking to students about these issues and referring them to resources and making a plan with them about how they're going to finish a class and those kinds of things. But I know that other grad

students are; like I heard a grad student once say, "I don't want to be a student's counselor." And I was like, "Well, that's fine because students are going to sense that and they're not going to come talk to you. (laughs) So you don't got to worry about it." (laughs)

Vanderscoff: Well, thank you. I appreciate you sharing some of those theories and ideas and practices about how you engage pedagogy. And I think all the things that we've been talking about will keep on intersecting as we move on to talking about your advocacy work as well.

Whatcott: Okay.

The Graduate Student Association (GSA)

Vanderscoff: And just for the record, we're one hour in, just so you know. Moving on, you actually have various areas of involvement, but I thought we could start with the main one and make sure that we have time with that, which is talking about the GSA. So if you could just say how and why you started getting involved, and we'll go from there.

Whatcott: Sure. I joined the GSA as a department rep in my second year. The Grad Student Association—the structure is it has an executive board of officers who do the day-to-day operations of implementing the decisions of the GSA. Then there's a GSA Council, which has one representative from each department where there's a graduate degree offered. We actually never have full representation. But that's the idea—your department is allowed a rep if you want one. 'And the reps meet three to five times per quarter and do a wide variety of things. And we send grad students to serve on campus committees: academic senate committees on issues of transportation, housing, fees, all kinds of things. And then we have internal committees. We have a travel grants committee and a committee called the Solidarity Committee.

My second year, my department didn't have a representative. So, I served as the Politics Department representative, going to the meetings and learning about the issues that were facing

graduate students, and learning about the opportunities that grad students have to make our voices heard. And I served on the travel grants committee, so I started learning about that whole process.

And then the next year I decided to run for a position called the Solidarity Officer. It's the newest position on the GSA and the idea is that it's a position devoted to supporting students from historically marginalized communities, graduate students. So I co-ran with Edher Zamudio, who's in the Latin American and Latino Studies Department. It's encouraged to be a co-position. We both had issues that we were passionate about. Edher was really passionate about undocumented student services and I really wanted to work on the issues of sexual violence and sexual harassment. So, we ran together and I started working on that issue and learning more about the GSA executive board, although I was mostly focused on the projects that I was working on.

Everyone involved in the board was really awesome and I made a lot of good friendships. So, this year I knew that I was living off of campus and that I was supposed to be doing my dissertation, so, I ran for secretary because I said hey, I'm organized, and I can take notes. (laughs) I served in that position for one quarter but because our presidents resigned, we didn't have a president during that time.

Vanderscoff: Did they resign for a particular reason?

Whatcott: They said it was too much work on top of already having to TA and write dissertations and everything else graduate students are expected to do. So, we didn't have a president. So I just finally stepped up and said, "I'll run for president." I was elected to be president in January of this year, so I haven't been doing it very long.

Vanderscoff: So a couple of questions, in review of what you just told me. I know that you were involved in initiating a campus sexual assault and harassment survey for grad students?

Whatcott: Yes.

Vanderscoff: And I don't know if we're getting ahead of ourselves and that's from the presidency, or whether that was from your time as solidarity—

Whatcott: Oh, that was when I was a solidarity officer.

Vanderscoff: So I'd be very interested if you—

Whatcott: Yeah, I was approached by a student named Amanda Reyes, who is in the History of Consciousness Department. She was involved in the union that represents TAs, tutors and leaders. That union has a committee called the Anti-Oppression Committee. I had heard that the university was going to be revising its sexual violence and sexual harassment policy and that they needed a graduate student to be on a student subcommittee that was going to revise it. I couldn't attend, but I convinced Amanda to go. (laughter) So Amanda went. And then when she came back she said, "I think we need to survey our grad students about their experiences with this on campus, and their experience of the resources on campus."

We're not professionals, but we did a survey, and we had got a lot of participation. We had 171 people respond.

Vanderscoff: Out of, I wonder what the grad population is on campus?

Whatcott: It's about 1500, 1600. Over a 10 percent response rate for a thing that we had no funding for. We felt pretty proud of it. Based on that survey, we came up with recommendations. And we met with Title IX; we joined the Campus Coordinated Response Team. I joined that with Nadia Roche, who was the president of the GSA last year. We joined that and we started getting involved and talking about grad students' unique needs around sexual violence and sexual harassment on campus.

I also was approached by some individual students with their individual stories. So that's always in the back of my mind—students who were sexually assaulted on this campus or sexually harassed, and who shared with me their personal stories about those experiences, and also their experiences with reporting and using campus resources. So that's been on my mind, too, when I make recommendations and talk about this issue.

Vanderscoff: And so then to whatever extent you can talk about it, if you can talk about it in a generalized way, what were the core takeaways from that survey as far as the issues, and then translating that to recommendations?

Whatcott: Yeah, so I knew that there were probably much higher rates of sexual assault and sexual harassment than had been reported to Title IX in the past. And we're now seeing that that's true. Reporting has gone way up since the new policy went into effect in 2016. But the survey also showed that. Before the new policy went into effect, we saw that much greater numbers of students—either they or themselves knew someone who had been assaulted or harassed. I think it was like one in three students—either they themselves or they knew someone who'd been sexually harassed, and one in ten knew someone who'd been sexually assaulted. A grad student.

And so, one of our main recommendations was to recognize the unique precarity of graduate students in reporting and dealing with these issues. And that's because we have multiple hats on campus. In the policy, we get treated as students, but that doesn't take into account that we're also teachers and employees. So sometimes it's a bit awkward if we walk into an advocate's office or a counseling office. We're worried: am I going to see my student here? Am I going to have to explain why I'm here? It can feel very vulnerable. So just being aware of those kinds of things about us accessing services.

And also, we're uniquely precarious because there are less accommodations that can be made for us. So if my advisor is harassing me, or someone on my committee, then that's really

different than like needing to move—not to belittle or downplay assault or harassment on an undergraduate level—but it's much easier to move someone into different housing than it is to figure out how to create a new committee for someone, especially if they came to the university to study with that person and there's no one else, there's no other professor who studies in the field that they study, or something like that. So we wanted to start a conversation about grad students' unique roles on campus, and how that made us extra precarious. I think that that message has really spread widely. 'I'm much more likely to hear someone say that now than when we did the survey three years ago. People are much more likely to say, "Grad students also have unique issues." So that's been great.

The other recommendations that we had were around the responsible employee part of the—so it says that TAs are responsible for reporting any sexual assault or sexual harassment that they become aware of.

Vanderscoff: You're mandated reporters.

Whatcott: Yes. And many grads were not super stoked about that, on one level. On the other level, they felt they did not have enough training or know enough about the resources on campus to be able to do that effectively. So, Title IX has been receptive to that and they started doing an in-person training for incoming graduate students. And so, we're seeing more opportunities for graduate students to get the tools that they need to effectively advocate for themselves and their students.

I would say where we still need to push is—I think that many of the decisions are still very liability-focused, like protecting the university from liability. I think we need to continue to insist that all the decisions are survivor-centered, that they are making decisions that are best for the survivors of violence and harassment.

Vanderscoff: And so you see that being the front that you're pushing on now, the question of getting away from, say, language around due diligence, towards language around health.

Whatcott: Yeah. I've encouraged them repeatedly to focus less on helping people report on others and more towards encouraging, letting people know that it's safe to make a report for themselves. That's a much more survivor-centered approach: giving people the tools and resources to report their own case, rather than investing in training people to be mandated reporters.

Vanderscoff: So unless there's anything further you'd like to say about that subject?

Whatcott: There's an event tonight, where I'm going to go talk about the survey and make the same recommendations. The other day I stumbled upon in the GSA office a bunch of brochures about sexual violence, old brochures, like from the nineties. And I was very sad. On the one hand, it's kind of sad. People in the seventies were so convinced that we could end sexual violence and sexual harassment on campuses and here we are in the 21st century, pretty much dealing with the same thing. That's kind of sad. But on the other hand, I hope that people are inspired by previous efforts and that they are able to build on them, that they're not having to keep inventing the wheel over and over again.

Vanderscoff: Thank you. So then let's talk a little bit about your presidency of the GSA.

Whatcott: Okay. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: And I'm interested in this because obviously it's one thing to represent your department, to come from the perspective of representing politics. But once you're the president, in theory, you're presiding over a body which includes people from all sorts of reaches of art, the humanities, the social sciences, the natural sciences. You're talking about very different disciplines, very different disciplinary cultures that might be associated with those places.

Whatcott: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: So I'm curious if you could reflect a little bit on that and then talk about adjusting to the presidency, stepping into that role.

Whatcott: Well, that's interesting. You know, there's a philosophy in feminist studies and critical race and ethnic studies that you start with the most oppressed people, or the most marginalized people, and if you can meet the needs of those people; then you know you're going to meet the needs of everybody. So that's sort of the approach that I take—this is a dramatic oversimplification. But for me, I'm like, okay, let's work on the issues of the people that have it the hardest, the grad students who are the most vulnerable and the most precarious, and then that means that we should be making grad life better for all students.

There are definitely grad students who don't share that perspective and I've gotten some like hate emails. (laughs) This is before I was the president. I got some hate emails from people who don't like the priorities of the GSA. If you say—we're going to do this project that benefits undocumented students, from my perspective, that is in line with my philosophy of starting with the most marginalized students. But you'll get people whose perspective is that you're only serving a special interest group and not all grad students. So that's been a bit tricky. It's a very thankless job, being the GSA president. (laughs) We give out tens of thousands of dollars of travel grants and sometimes people complain. And it's just hard. I mean, a lot of times you'll get the "thank you for this money" email. But then you'll get another email that's like, "This is so hard to fill out and takes too long. It's taking too long to get paid." Yeah, this is (sighs) just part of the job, I guess, is to smooth those people over. So I try to focus on our successes and ignore the haters as much as possible, or be as diplomatic to the haters as I can.

Vanderscoff: So if you could just give an overview of the responsibilities that you have in this current job. So, one thing is, the GSA in general is disbursing travel grants. And then another thing is you're talking about targeted initiatives to support undocumented students. And so,

I'm wondering if you could be a little more specific about what the key areas of responsibility are for the president *Vis*-à-*vis* what the GSA does?

Whatcott: Yes. So, the president's in charge of coordinating the Council, coordinating the Executive Board, and assisting all those people in doing their jobs, and then also being the point of contact between administrators and the GSA council. So practically, that means that I go to meetings with President Napolitano at the university Office of the President. I meet with the chancellor; I meet with the executive vice chancellor; I meet with the Grad Division. I meet with a lot of people. And I try to take all of the input that I get from grad students through these various channels and make targeted requests of administrators. I try to convey to them what grad student life is like and what grad students need from them.

So, for example, priorities this year have been talking about the housing crisis and seeing what the university has in the works in terms of creating more housing for students, and then bringing that back to grad students and asking their opinions about certain aspects of it, and then bringing that back to the administrators and saying: this is our feedback on the current grad student housing structure and what you should do differently when you build more grad student housing. Those kinds of things.

Housing has come up a lot this year. I've continued to work on sexual violence and sexual harassment. International grad student support is something—we have a new International Grad Student Committee coordinator who has talked to me about some of the issues facing international grad students. Our solidary officer is working on an event to help support undocumented students.

Other things in the past have been funding packages. We're paid way less here at UC Santa Cruz than many other comparable universities and we live in one of the tightest housing markets in the country. So, compensation is part of it. And the other part of it is that many

students have been confused about what they were actually being offered when they came, so we worked with the grad division on making a clear offer letter and those kinds of things.

We worked on issues of childcare. So, last year the childcare center on campus closed down for part of the summer. We wrote a letter to the director about how that was going to impact graduate students. We've worked on parking issues, on which we were not successful.[32] (laughs)

Vanderscoff: Trying to secure more spaces for—

Whatcott: No. They merged together the graduate student and the faculty parking passes. We really didn't want them to do that, but they did. So, we've worked on a number of issues like that.

Vanderscoff: Okay. So, if you're in a job where you have to bridge the gap between Janet Napolitano and then like a Marxist in Histcon or something like that, you're talking about a pretty—(laughs) that's a substantial spectrum.

Whatcott: Yeah. Like what do I ask for?

Vanderscoff: So I guess I'm curious about your communication style and how that's translated into successful conversations, and places where there seems to be continued frustration. Maybe we can start with how that operates on a UCSC level with the chancellors and the EVC and so forth, and then we can scale that up to systemwide.

Whatcott: Well, it's been interesting because my background is not in diplomacy or things like this. It's been a bit of a learning curve. No, that's not true. I, hmm—I've had experiences that prepared me for figuring out how to talk to people. I think I said I grew up in the punk and

[32] Whatcott added the following footnote during the editing of this transcript: "After this interview, the Transportation and Parking Services director met with the GSA to discuss proposed changes that could have curtailed free weekend parking in certain lots. The director heard our concerns and agreed to make no changes and to keep free weekend parking in place in the same lots."

anarchist community, so I'm much more familiar with communities not trusting people in power and doing things for ourselves. And so, when I started organizing against prisons, or organizing on behalf of prisoners, I had to figure out how to talk to people in power and to make requests that they were going to be able to hear and do something about. So, for example, if I have a prisoner who has a medical issue and they feel like they're not receiving the appropriate care, then I had to learn to first do research about: who can I ask about this? What are the standards of care which can guide me in how I make my request? And then, what leverage do I have? How can I convince this person that they need to do what's right here? What can I, not really threaten to do—but I've taken classes in mediation before, where they teach you where you have to make people see what the worst outcome is of not participating. And so that was my approach—what's the worst outcome of them not doing this and how do I make them see that? That really trained me in how to do my research: who has power over what, and then how to make a request that someone's going to be able to hear. I think I brought that into the position. I don't know, though. I don't really have deep faith in the system to make the radical changes that I think need to happen to actually make life sustainable and healthy for people. But I can maybe make minor changes that can give people more breathing room, I guess. So that's what I go for.

I think the union, for example, has a very important role. I don't collaborate closely with union organizers, but I'm never going to sell them out. I'm always going to have their back when I'm meeting with administrators and those kinds of things. Because I think that we can do different things. I can do something as the GSA president and they can do something entirely different as people who have bargaining power, for example.

Vanderscoff: And how do you see that dynamic that you describe play out in terms of like UCSC administration verses systemwide?

Whatcott: What do you mean?

Vanderscoff: Well, some of the concerns that you're expressing, if you're meeting with someone like Blumenthal, or until recently, Allison Galloway, or whomever, you're expressing certain issues which are germane to UCSC. Whereas, I suppose if you're having a conversation with someone like Napolitano, or someone who's on that sort of Regents level, or systemwide administration, that you're having a conversation that's actually spanning, I would imagine, multiple universities, or you're taking something from here and sort of taking it up to the top. So I'm curious about how those different conversations play out.

Whatcott: Okay. For example, at the meeting I went to with Napolitano, it was right after the Milo Yiannopoulos tour, where he was scheduled to speak at UC Berkeley, UC Davis, several of the other UCs. He actually wasn't scheduled to speak here, thank goodness. And so, we had a conversation at the meeting about some follow-up to how the university handled that.

So, I guess I should give the background. What happened at UC Berkeley is that students and grad students made several attempts to try to shut that event down. And the university said that it was a free speech issue and that it was a college—I think it was the College Republicans, so it was a student club bringing the very controversial speaker to campus, and that was the free speech right of the student club to bring the speaker.

Other students went to the administration and said, "This person one, uses hate speech, and two, has attacked individual students at other campuses." There was another campus where he had gone to where he had posted a picture of a trans student and then proceeded to make all kinds of really offensive comments about her. So, it wasn't just an issue of free speech. It was reframing it to say, "We're scared for our individual students being attacked by this person."

Anyway, the university declined to shut down the event. So, then the night of the event, hundreds of students and community members showed up, engaged in a wide variety of protest against the event, ranging from quietly holding signs, to some people started tearing down the barricades at the event. And eventually there was a fire. And there was police use of, I

think, pepper spray. I'm actually not 100 percent sure on that. Anyway, it got really intense. (laughs)

So we talked to Napolitano about that event and what could have been done. And I took my experience on this campus with students being arrested on a picket line a few years ago, which I was very, very upset about. I can't believe that the university arrested those students and then charged them. Anyway, I took that experience to speak out about the militarization of the police on UC campuses. And also, just to ask them, I asked UCOP, "Did you try reaching out to the students who were organizing the event beforehand, to let them know why this event was so worrying for many students?" Like, let's just start at a human level, you know? I think I took my experience with the students being arrested to make those two observations and hopefully in the future we can rethink the use of SWAT-style police on our campus, riot police, I guess I should say, and we can encourage administrators to reach out on a much more human level to student organizers before things escalate to that level.

Vanderscoff: Great. So, in your capacity as the president in this job, which you called often "thankless," (laughs) bringing it back to UCSC, what do you see as the key issues that you're pushing right now? I think we've already talked about at least one of them. What are the key issues? Where is traction not happening? And where is traction happening, as far as the key issues that you think are affecting the grad student community here?

Whatcott: So a positive one is support for undocumented students. Napolitano has, surprisingly, mobilized many resources in support of undocumented students, including if undocumented students have any legal trouble, the university will provide them with an attorney. Our chancellor is very supportive of this, although he said he didn't want to be arrested when I asked him how far he would go. (laughter) But he is very supportive of undocumented students. And even our police chief. I also go to the police advisory board meetings. He is taking a pretty proactive line to protect undocumented students. And our

Solidarity Officer told me it's called [DACAmented] students, referring to students who are enrolled in the DACA program. A new word for me. So, I do think that a lot of people are very concerned and want to protect those students against the Trump administration's war against them. I think that's a very positive thing on our campus.

Vanderscoff: And so, what sort of steps can be taken? And you might be more talking about that with the hat that you wear with the advisory board here, as far as keeping students safe. I mean, is this a matter of putting up some legalistic hurdles to ICE's presence? I mean, what does that like—

Whatcott: Well, so my understanding is that the local ICE—I think they're ICE; they might be Homeland Security. The local ICE officers met with our police chief. And apparently a campus is a sensitive location, meaning that enforcement actions are not to be taken lightly and they're supposed to consult with the Chief of Police before they come on campus for those reasons. And so, I asked the police chief if he would set up an advisory board of people who would come up with some hypothetical situations and advise him on how to respond if ICE does ask to come on campus. And he was receptive to that. I mean, the administration made it clear that they're not going to stand in front of an ICE officer to protect a student. That's not going to happen. But they have put in place a lot of legal support for students. And they're very aware; they do want to make our campus safe for those students. And they're doing the best that they can.

And Napolitano has actually taken on Trump. She wrote a recent piece in, I think it was *The Atlantic,* where she criticized his policies. So there're some proactive things happening for those students. I don't know how much I can offset that it's a really scary, scary time for all immigrants right now, everyone. But I think it's good to know that the university is trying to stand up for them.

Student Housing Crisis

The thing that feels really big and overwhelming and unyielding is the housing situation on campus. So, like I said, I commute. I didn't necessarily want to, but I couldn't afford the rent in Santa Cruz. I had a difficult time having landlords return my calls and emails. I have a dog and so I can't live on campus. I felt a bit trapped about that. So I've been personally affected by the housing crisis, and I've heard from many students, especially international students, who are really being gouged by the rent around here, and who are living in unzoned places, or who are doubling up, or living with a bunch of other students. People are commuting. I know a ton of students that commute from the East Bay, because I carpool with them. (laughs) So increasingly, people are driving really long distances to get here. I've heard that recently rents have maybe gone down a little bit. But that part feels really unwieldy. And the campus's solution is to build; is to do a public/private partnership. So, they just put out; I think they've just received the bids. They're going to get bids from private companies to build more dorms on campus.

Vanderscoff: And then, so far as your list of points, is that something that satisfies that in any way, or addresses that in any meaningful way? Is that the answer that you all have been looking for?

Whatcott: I'm opposed to privatization, so it's not my first choice. But I understand that there really may not be another option because of the debt ceiling situation. The university can't take on any more debt. But the thing that I've heard overwhelmingly from students, and that also frustrates me, is that the price of housing on campus is more expensive than living in town. And it's going to continue to be that way. And so, I asked President Napolitano about this and she said that grad students needed to ask for more compensation. I was like, wait, say that again. (laughs) So, I don't know. But I've tried to communicate very clearly that students cannot afford to pay—grad students pay 1100 dollars to live in grad student housing on campus for a single room. They know what we get paid as TAs. We get like 1900 dollars a month, so it's way more

than 50 percent of our rent people are paying to live on campus. It's ridiculous. So, I think the administration knows my position on this very clearly. (laughter)

Vanderscoff: And so, before we move on to just a few final points, is there anything else you'd like to say about your presidency, either in terms of the constituency which you represent and your dynamic with them, or with different divisions with them—or anything further about initiatives that you have going?

Whatcott: What I like about the GSA is normally if you're in your division—your social science or your humanities or your science or your engineering—you don't interact with very many people from other divisions. And what I like about the GSA is we have people from all the divisions that come to the meetings. So, it's cool to get to see what we have in common and to unite our voice on different issues.

Vanderscoff: And you find that to be possible over whatever sort of translational dilemma there might be?

Whatcott: Oh, yeah, totally. I've met some really interesting people that I probably would have never met otherwise.

Activism in the Town of Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: That's interesting, thanks. So, moving ahead, we've already talked a lot about the city and county of Santa Cruz and your relationship to it. But one thing that I did want to talk about that relates to some of your earlier work, which you've also brought up, is the Santa Cruz jail conditions survey. I thought that might be an interesting thing to talk about, also as a way of someone from the university interacting with the town.

Whatcott: So, like I said, I had eight years of experience of organizing around Pelican Bay State Prison. So, when I came here, I looked around to see if I could get involved in something. And I

participated for a while with this group called Sin Barras, which works on various issues. It's a great group, and I met some really great people there. But I got overwhelmed by my schoolwork and had to step back. But before I did, I helped them put together a survey that they were going to use to, because they were going weekly to the jail to bring pizza and just chat with people about their experiences with the jail. There had been several deaths in the jail. I think there were five or six deaths in the jail. And so, they were especially concerned about mental and medical health treatment in the jail. They were asking people about those kinds of things and trying to gather information so that they could organize around those issues.

They were surveying both people who were visiting people in jail and people who were being released from jail. I'll say that when I first came here I was really curious about the jail. And so I went. They have this volunteer training at the jail because they have a number of programs that go in, from AA to churches. A number of things. So, I went to this volunteer training. And I got to have a tour of the jail. I was pretty horrified. It's very dismal in there. Each of the pods has like forty people in there and they all have to share a bathroom. I was just kind of horrified about having to think about sharing a bathroom with forty people.

And then, the other thing is that there were some people who had been in the jail for multiple years. Like they said that someone had been there for six years. And it is not set up for people to be living there for six years. It's a temporary detention place. So, I was pretty horrified by that as well.

Vanderscoff: And so the survey happens. Basically, the impact of the survey then is that it goes into their ongoing advocacy work on this issue?

Whatcott: Yes.

Vanderscoff: Any further comment about what became of the survey and its data?

Whatcott: The folks that I knew most closely don't actually live in Santa Cruz anymore and don't work with the group. So, I don't know, I can't speak about specifics, about what they ended up doing with the survey. But, I think, in general the idea was that they would use it in their campaigns. There was a private medical service provider contracted out to provide medical treatment in the jail and they were trying to get those people released from their contract, or to get the county to not renew the contract. I think that was the campaign that they were working on. But I don't know where it is right now.

Vanderscoff: So one final question before we come into some concluding wrap-ups. So, the time that you've been at UCSC in politics, with your emphases in feminist studies and in CRES, it's been a time when there's been a lot of national conversation and changing prominence of a lot of issues of racial justice, for example. It must be an interesting time to be studying in some of these spaces, when we've had the various political movements that have been overtaking this country, and then, of course with the recent election, this whole galvanizing moment for a lot of these movements. So could you reflect on moments in your own education where you saw the intersection of these larger events? And then what that has meant, either for you as an educator, in terms of working with undergrads in your sections, or for yourself as a grad student and a scholar, working in related areas.

Whatcott: Hmm, let me think about that.

Vanderscoff: It's a big question. I wish we had more time to do it justice. But it's something I wanted to address, at least.

Whatcott: So what's interesting is that my research looks at something called carceral humanism, which refers to a current movement where sheriffs, for example, try to get money that is set aside for mental health programs funneled into jails, for example. The California Department of Corrections has this thing that they do in the women's prisons called trauma-informed care. So, they claim to be providing mental health services to people who are locked

up. The problem with that is that jails and prisons are very traumatizing, violent places. And so, I would much rather prefer mental health dollars be going into community programs that prevent people from ending up in jail in the first place, jail or prison.

National Politics

What's interesting about this political moment is that a lot of lines are being redrawn, and weird kinds of coalitions are happening. For example, right now Newt Gingrich has spoken out about prison reform. (laughter) We're at a very interesting moment where we need to reassess our assumptions about political factions, political unities and political coalitions. I am not the kind of person who can be like, "Great, Newt Gingrich! Join us." I'm very suspicious of what Newt Gingrich's agenda is and what he means by prison reform. That kind of critical thinking is rewarded at UC Santa Cruz and I'm in the right place if I'm having those kinds of thoughts.

But everything is really up in the air. The current administration is critical of globalization but very neoliberal. I've always taught my students about neo-liberalism and globalization but now I need to rethink how I'm talking about those issues to my students. We've seen the resurgence of nationalism all over the globe so we've got to pull out those old readings on nationalism that a lot of people abandoned in favor of talking about things like globalization. We're having to revise how we structure our classes and how we talk about these things with students. And honestly, my students are probably going to be the ones who come up with new insights and understandings about what's happening and how to combat it. People that are further along and are more entrenched in how they think about things are going to have a more difficult time wrapping their head around what's happening.

Vanderscoff: There's an impact you feel then in terms of your own work, I suppose.

Whatcott: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: I mean, the instability of these categories.

Whatcott: Yeah, totally. I think it's exciting and I want to be real about that with my students. I think it's important to give students a background—like, "This happened, this happened, this happened -- so this is how we used to talk about these issues. But now something else entirely different is happening and it's up to you to learn about it, do research on it, and teach us older folks about it."

Final Reflections

Vanderscoff: That's great. So, coming around to our final question—at this point I'd like to invite you to reflect on UCSC in a larger sense, in terms of how it's been for you as a place to think from. This is a place for larger comments and critique. So, one question there is if you could reflect on how UCSC has been for you distinct, or not, as an institution, what seems to set it apart, and how does that relate to whatever opportunities and resources you have here for your own scholarship and work?

Whatcott: Okay. So, you're asking me to think about what sets UCSC apart?

Vanderscoff: Yeah, exactly. And this might be drawing on conversations that you've had with other grad students who belong to other institutions. I was a grad student at a different institution and I found that UC Santa Cruz signified something to people about something, for good or for bad.

Whatcott: Yes. (laughs) What does it signify?

Vanderscoff: Those are the conversations I'm asking you about.

Whatcott: Okay. Well, maybe an anecdote will work. I went to a conference, the Western Political Science Conference Association, in San Diego. I got put on a panel with, I would say, three other more conventional social scientists. I don't really do social science, even though I'm in the social science division. So, my paper was very different and I don't think that the panel

moderator really got it at all. The questions she asked me, I was like, "You just didn't get it, what I was saying."

A friend attended the panel and afterwards I was like, "Was I really unclear about the arguments I was making?" And she said, "No. You're just from Santa Cruz." (laughter) I was like, oh. She was like, "Yeah, you've received a really particular kind of training, which is not going to be apparent to you until you start interacting with people outside. Then it's going to become clear—the uniqueness of the kind of thinking that you're doing. And you're going to have to work to translate it to others more than if you were just giving a paper at UC Santa Cruz, where people have a similar kind of training or intellectual practice."

So that was helpful for me to think about. I've learned a particular language, I would say, of critical thinking at Santa Cruz. And now that I'm starting to present at conferences and other things, I have to remember to translate that for others and be like an ambassador, I guess. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: So if Santa Cruz teaches you this particular approach, does it also teach you to translate it? Or how does one develop that? (laughs)

Whatcott: Well, I don't know. I think it's still, I'm still learning how to do that. I don't know. I'm sort of losing my words. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: Well, the timing's fine. We're just about at the end here. One question is, has UCSC seemed to have changed in your time here? Does it seem to be changing into something? Do you have a sense of what that momentum is? And you can comment as a president here, or whatever that is, in this time of changing politics on a nationwide scale, what are you seeing happen here?

Whatcott: Hmm. I don't know. My department is changing, for sure. We've gotten a lot more international students, a lot more students who want to do more empirical work, students who

fit more conventionally in political science categories. So that's definitely changing. There's still a really strong tradition of student activism, students feeling very passionately about issues that happening at a national and global scale. I was so proud of my students who were in the class that I TA'd last quarter, where they were organizing events around the Muslim travel ban and in support of immigrants and those kinds of things. So that's still very strong at Santa Cruz. A suspicion of authority is still very present, which is dear to my heart. Sometimes it's frustrating being the GSA president and then people accuse me of being the establishment. I'm like, what? So sometimes it's annoying. But, in general, I really like that about this place.

I don't know if you've ever seen this, but UCSC in one study was one of the most cited—the faculty were the most cited in scholarly papers. So, we have some strengths here. I learned when I was on the Graduate Council that our astronomy department is world-renowned. So, there are programs and things happening here that I'm not even fully aware of, that are outstanding and world recognizable. So that's still continuing, definitely.

Vanderscoff: Great. And final question, so when you reflect on your education here—we've been talking about you looking back, mostly—but when you look forward, what sense do you have of your own trajectory?

Whatcott: What? (laughs)

Vanderscoff: So how much time do you have left here at Santa Cruz with your degree, and then thinking beyond that? Has everything that's happened so far pointed you in one direction or another? We've had people give very various answers to this.

Whatcott: Oh, okay. I am in my fourth year, and normative time is six years, so I don't think I'll be here longer than two more years after this year. One thing that's changed for me is, while I love teaching and I think I'll continue to do it in some capacity, but I've become more open

recently to other kinds of careers that I might pursue after school than being an academic at a research institution. So, I'm not sure. I'm really open to what happens after.

Of course, I'm going to continue to be committed to social justice causes. That's a part of my life that will always be there in some capacity and I appreciate the ways that UC Santa Cruz has sustained me in doing that work.

I don't know if I'll stay in the Bay Area. It's very challenging making a living here, which is unfortunate, because there's a lot—I mean even my neighborhood that I live in right now, it's a suburby neighborhood and there's been tons of houses for rent. And our house that we rent got sold to an investor. Things are changing in the Bay Area. So, it will be interesting to see how those changes impact UC Santa Cruz. Yeah, I hope that UC Santa Cruz is proactive in making sure that a wide variety of students can still come here and be part of the school.

Vanderscoff: Wonderful. So that's all I have on my end. Is there anything else you'd like to say in closing?

Whatcott: I don't think so.

Vanderscoff: Perfect.

Whatcott: I'm all talked out. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: Thank you so much for taking your time, and for all the work you do on campus, and for sharing some of that with us today.

Whatcott: Okay, Thanks.

Vanderscoff: Thank you.

Sabina Wildman

At the time of her interview, Sabina Wildman was a sophomore majoring in sociology. She grew up in the Mission District of San Francisco and is the daughter of Pakistani mother and a white father. She is active in the Muslim Student Association, Students for Justice in Palestine, the Mixed Ethnicities Student Headquarters, and other student activist organizations. Wildman is a Crown College student, where she has worked as a residential assistant and is serves on the Crown Student Senate.

Vanderscoff: Okay. It's Wednesday, April 12, 2017 and this is Cameron Vanderscoff here for the Student Interviews Oral History project at UC Santa Cruz. What we've been doing at the beginning of these interviews is asking people to introduce themselves in whatever words they choose and then say a little bit about your background.

Wildman: Okay. My name is Sabina Wildman and I'm a sophomore here at UC Santa Cruz. I'm studying or majoring in sociology, possibly minoring in education, still figuring that out. I am very involved in student life and student organizations throughout campus. I'm particularly involved in Crown College because I am a residential assistant, an RA there. And I'm also involved in student government. So, I get to hear a lot about issues that are affecting students and work with a lot of students and that's really great. I'm a member of SFAC, which is the Student Fee Advisory Committee. And I'm also very involved in various student organizations, including MSA, the Muslim Student Association; SJP, Students for Justice in Palestine; SWANA, Southwestern Asian North African; SASJ, South Asians for Social Justice; MESH, Mixed Ethnicities Student Headquarters; yada, yada, yada. (laughs) Anyway, I'm pretty involved and I would consider myself an activist on campus. And I really care about people in general.

Early Background

Vanderscoff: Great. So, as you know, our main focus is talking about your time at UCSC. One question I've been asking everyone is, we'd like to know a little bit about whatever it is you're

bringing with you here. So, I'm wondering if you could say a little bit about where you're from, your personal family background, leading into then your educational background.

Wildman: Okay. So, I was born and raised in the Mission District of San Francisco. I feel it's important to say "Mission District," because a lot of people born and raised in San Francisco have very different experiences and my experience is specifically watching gentrification happen in the neighborhood. That's something that's been very personal to my childhood, as you see the techies and the generally young white folks moving in and raising prices of everything and forcing other people out and increasing police presence. So that's kind of like a background of mine.

Another important background of mine is that I'm mixed race. On one side of my family, I'm technically first generation, but not on the other side, so it's kind of confusing. But my mom emigrated here from Pakistan, so she's Pakistani-American. So, I'm half Pakistani and I'm half white. So, I'm mixed race. And that's always been an important part of my identity growing up, especially because me and my siblings, we look different. People say different things. They think we're friends, we're not siblings. And I hear and literally see how people are being treated differently based on how they look. My older sibling has darker skin than me, and my mom does, and I see myself being treated differently from them in the same situations. So, racial injustice is constantly something that is very visible and has been visible to me in my life. I am a "white-passing" person, so I have privilege from the systems of white supremacy in some ways, but I also don't in other ways. So that's always something that I'm interested in looking at. And part of the reason I chose UC Santa Cruz is because of the diversity of the campus compared to other universities I was looking at.

You were saying the history of my education before?

Vanderscoff: Yeah.

Wildman: So I attended an interesting school that not that many people know about, a very small charter school in the Mission District that's a K through 8, kind of a hippie school, if I can say that. (laughs) It's called Synergy School, if that gives you kind of a feeling for it. It's very much a very close community trying to work on non-hierarchical systems. So, we didn't have a principal, for instance. We called our teachers by their first names. There was a lot of meeting time and music and art and reflection and collaboration, and a lot of learning about things the dominant narrative very much ignores in education. So, looking at the things that are oftentimes pushed aside. So, we would spend a lot of time learning about the civil rights movement and slavery. And that definitely has impacted my life greatly, especially just the community. It really felt like a real community that I was part of.

And after that, I went to public high school, which was a different experience for me. Because for instance, in my middle school, we had something called lubbies. They aren't lockers, but they aren't cubbies. So, we didn't have locks on things. So, there was this big idea of community and respect and not needing to hide your stuff. There was a lot of trust. And then I go to public high school. And actually, I didn't go to the Mission. Of all the rumors that like those are bad schools. And I toured them. You can't wear the gang colors; there are metal detectors; there are fences around campus. The privilege that I had was getting into a high school that was across the city, a magnet, very academic high school, Lowell High School. And that was a very different experience for me, everything from culturally to rules-wise, everything was very different. Figuring out a locker. But also, I think, the switch to academic rigor was definitely something that really has affected me, being in a high school environment where students are very focused on their grades and specifically getting As. And there was a huge lack of self-care and a lot of sleep deprivation. It's a very stressful environment with a lot of hours of homework and a lot of competition in general. So, it was a very different kind of educational environment switching to high school.

I would also say that in high school I noticed how my K-8 experience was very different from most people's. I was telling my mom at the time I was in high school, I was like, this isn't fair—I don't know anything about European history and they're teaching it to all of us and they assume we all know it. But I didn't know anything about it, really. And I still don't really much, because I don't really focus on that. I had a very strong background in certain things that other people didn't. I'm still realizing how grateful I am for that kind of education. But also, that it feels kind of weird—the privilege of not going to public school for my K-8.

In high school, I was able to meet a lot more people from different backgrounds, but it was a majority Eastern Asian American. There's one other person I found who was my same racial mix. And we'd hang out, and some other people. But there was a very dominant culture and I did not feel I generally fit in, although I was very involved. I was on the basketball team all four years, so that was a big part of my high school experience. School has always been very important to me. (laughs) So I really paid attention to my education in high school.

Applying to UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: And so in this setting, how then did you find out about UC Santa Cruz in the first place?

Wildman: So, my older sibling applied to UCs and CSUs. And as the second sibling, your expectations are based on how the older sibling does. And so, my older sibling attended UC Davis for a little bit and then they had to leave due to mental health reasons. That was something that was difficult for me to hear about. And also knowing that the UCs were very focused on—like whenever I heard presentations of different schools or looked online, they're very focused on research and math and sciences. And whenever I thought of research, I always thought of scientists in labs and it was really hard for me to picture myself as someone who was interested in social studies. (laughs) So I was really strongly aware that my specific academic interests wouldn't really be represented at a UC. So, what I did when I applied to universities is

I told my mom, "Actually, I'm going to apply to private liberal arts schools and I'm going to get scholarships."

She's like, "No, that doesn't really happen. They're very expensive. We won't be able to afford it. But if you can get scholarships, we'll think about it."

So, I was like okay, I'm going to prove her wrong [and] be able to go to a place that would fit me better, but also prove kind of what my family expected me to do, which was either UC or CSU. So, I actually got into a lot of private liberal arts schools with scholarships. And some of them without scholarships, like the more top-ranked ones. But I ended up deciding between one university that was a private liberal arts school in Worcester, Massachusetts, a very snowy place, Clark University, which is a very small university, but they gave me a great scholarship. And they're really focused on liberal arts education. They seem to be a pretty interesting campus. They're 80 or 90 percent white, which was a really weird experience for me, growing up in the Mission District, growing up in San Francisco. And very upper class. The buildings were very fancy. And everything was how I almost expected college to be, but it didn't quite feel right, the more I thought about it. Even though I wanted to go away from home and kind of prove people wrong and be my own person.

So, then I was also looking at UC Santa Cruz. I got into some of the other UCs. My dream UC was UCLA. Part of that was the urban environment, because I was actually set on living in a city. But that was honestly all I knew, coming from San Francisco. Because I was like, there's nothing outside of cities. What do people even do? (laughs) Growing up. Because whenever I visited people in the suburbs, I'm like okay, so there are shopping malls and buildings. What else? People drive everywhere.

And so, I guess with UC Santa Cruz, some of the pull that it had for me was its diversity, but also its feel on campus. I also got into Santa Barbara, Irvine, and a couple of other UCs. And I got into Davis, too. I was really strongly, I don't know, excited to see that people on campus

were having so much fun with each other [at UCSC]. People were enjoying spending time with each other. It seemed like people were really real. There was a kind of friendly energy on this campus that didn't really exist at other UCs. [At] the competition, I felt like everyone was in their own world, kind of hustling to the next class. It's true that that exists here at Santa Cruz, and you see that more when you go to the place. But just coming to the campus, I definitely noticed that and that stood out to me.

Also, the nature, or just the redwoods, was definitely a big thing for me. But what's interesting is that at first, I didn't really like it, because I didn't want to like it. Because I didn't want to be pushed into a UC, just back to the same thing. So, my family would be like, "Wow, this campus is so beautiful." I'd be like, "Yeah, it is. But I don't like the buildings. They're not as pretty as at Clark." (laughs) And it's true. The buildings here are concrete. The buildings aren't really the beauty of campus. They really don't encompass that. It's really the people and I would say all the nature — the trees, the forests, all the wildlife, the turkeys and deer.

But anyways, I decided on UC Santa Cruz also because my mom's—her second cousin's wife—actually applied to UC Santa Cruz for her graduate studies and she didn't get in, but she went to the admissions office and basically asked what can I do to get in, and made sure that she got in. And I was like wow, someone cares that much to get into UC Santa Cruz? Because at first, everyone was telling me like UC Davis is ranked higher. All the other UCs seemed to have these big, boastful numbers, and Santa Cruz—people thought of as their backup school, or their last choice." Well, if it's the only UC I get into, I guess I'll go there. But I didn't know anyone who was like, "Oh, Santa Cruz, that's my first choice, I love it." So, it's definitely the environment, of not even thinking of going to a UC as a huge privilege, or going to a university in general. Instead of like, oh, Santa Cruz is the bottom of the rung kind of thing. But anyway, I was like wow, someone would actually do that much to go here. So that made it seem like something that I would want more.

And then touring campus, we must have walked through the humanities building. My mom kept on telling me, "They care about humanities here. See, they built this new building, the humanities building." She was really trying to say, "No, they're not only going to do math and science here. And there are some psychology people here who are kind of big." I was thinking of doing psychology.

But what really got me was when we were walking through one of the floors and I saw "Angela Davis" written on one of the name tags for one of the offices. And I was like, what?! I had no idea she went here. I did a project on her in third grade. I love her! You have no idea how much I love her. And, for me, doing a project on her in third grade to me feels normal. But not that many other people would have a chance to do a project on Angela Davis in third grade—that was my K through eight. So, I was really excited about that. I was like, okay, if she's a professor, I'm [already] here. That means that there's activism still on campus. And a big part of what I liked about Santa Cruz also, is that at least historically, there's this idea that students are really active. A lot of it is in hippie culture, but I think a lot of it in my mind was the whole slogan of the authority on questioning authority. That's something that definitely resonates with me. So, there were definitely a lot of pulls to Santa Cruz. The little downtown is cute. But yeah, the feel of campus was pretty important. And watching people.

And I remember recognizing at other universities that I went to, minority or racial minority students were all hanging out together, because there were so few. But I noticed when I came to Santa Cruz there were enough people from minorities to be able to hang out with different people and that people felt comfortable enough hanging out with different races. I saw mixed race couples. And I was like okay, I can breathe now. Because a lot of the universities I visited were really white and that was really weird for me. I just couldn't picture myself there.

Vanderscoff: And so all of these things tip you to Santa Cruz—

Wildman: Yes.

First Impressions of UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: —These factors. And so, then what I'm really curious about is if we can go into the first day, first weeks that we're here. Take that impression—and then if you could talk about the reality that you found here relative to that impression, and then relative to home as well, since you've sketched this continuity for us.

Wildman: Mm hmm. So I was still, even after I made my statement of intent to register, I was still kind of like uh, okay, I guess I'm going to UC Santa Cruz. I guess it's a pretty campus. My family wants me to go here; that's good. I can do social studies here. I think the social studies department is kind of strong maybe here. And Angela Davis. So that's chill.

I got into the Honors program here as well, and that was another pull for me to come here, actually. I forgot to mention that. That was a big pull, also, because I got money from that. I still get money from that. And just being able to have that small group of people that I'm part of, and have the privilege of signing up for classes early for that first-year Honors program thing, and all that sort of thing, definitely made me feel like okay, well I guess they see something in me. But I was kind of like oh, that's interesting, because I was already separated out from the main student body in a way, which made me feel uncomfortable. But I was really happy that there wasn't separate housing. Because some of the universities where I had gotten into Honors programs, there was separate housing. So, I was really glad I got to live with normal people, everyone. (laughs) Not just nerdy kids. '

Crown College

Then I had to choose between two colleges. It was either Crown or Cowell. And Crown's theme just really upset me to the point where I could never live there. It's science, technology and society. I'm very careful of the way technology's affecting people and I'm really not a fan of

certain technologies and I really don't engage in them very often because I don't really enjoy that.

Vanderscoff: Does this relate to the tech transformation of the Mission District in San Francisco?

Wildman: Probably. I mean, also just the more I learn about things—like I have a dumb phone. I don't have a smartphone. And I'm not planning on changing it. I don't need that. I do have a computer and that does what I need. I think it's a lot of people being closed off to social environments and social skills and relating to people. But also, all the blood and violence behind the creation of technology is definitely something—Foxconn, the mining of the metals. There's a lot of stuff that's really—and e-waste—that I think about a lot when I think of technology.

And then the science part, I was like no, that's exactly what I don't want. That's why I'm going to Santa Cruz out of all the UCs. I don't want more science. I want less science.

I called them and I was like okay, so I'm going to put Cowell as my first choice. Do I have to put Crown as my second choice? Because I want Oakes to be my second choice. It's about communicating diversity. I was like, I really don't want Crown. I was like, you have no idea how much I don't want Crown.

They're like, "Oh, yeah, usually you'll get your first choice in the Honors program. So, don't worry about it. Just put Crown as your second." I was like, okay, cool. And I do that. I put Cowell as my first choice. And I'm picturing myself living in Cowell. Because that's where they take you on the tour, those white buildings with the trees and everything. I'm like oh, maybe I'll live in this building.

And then I find out I'm in Crown. And I'm like, oh my gosh. So, I call. I think I didn't find out, maybe I was away or something. I wasn't able to appeal in time, or something happened.

Maybe my family convinced me it would be good to be around people who are very different from me.

I called and I was like, "Crown is not going to work for me because I don't like technology or science." And my mom kept on telling me, "It does say the word 'society' there." I'm like, "I guess."

So, then they were like, "Oh, you know what? That can be a very important thing because you have very different feelings. You don't like video gaming, even though the stereotype of Crown is that there are a lot of video gamers. So maybe you'll learn a lot and maybe you'll be able to teach people a lot of things. And it can be a really good thing." I'm like, "Okay, it can be a good thing." But on the inside, I'm like no, I'm going to hate it.

Then I came to summer orientation. And everyone—all the orientation leaders were so cool, and so much fun and like real people. I was really excited. I felt like I could do life here. I made what I thought were going to be my best friends, but I don't even talk to them; we didn't even talk after summer orientation. But it was such a good experience, orientation really was. And that's part of the reason why I work for orientation now, too.

But anyway, so then Welcome Week comes through. And I'm meeting people in my building. They're all STEM majors. Most of them are computer science or computer engineering. Robotics or something like that. The bio majors are the few. There's one other social studies major in my entire building. She's an art major and she ended up leaving to go to Porter because she couldn't handle how STEM-heavy the building and the college is.

So, I was kind of like okay, I'm going to do my readings and do my essays. And people are telling me "Your major's easy. My classes are so hard. It's so impacted." And I'm like, "Uh, it's impacted for me, too." And they're the kind of people who are like, "Wow, I have an essay." I'm like, "I can help you." But it's the kind of thing where a lot of people are sitting in the

lounge in the building always doing their programming and math problems and science problems together. And I'm sitting there trying to do my reading, but they talk out loud. And I can't do reading/talking out loud, because it's a different kind of studying, where you don't have to be really applied in a different way.

So anyway, I had a lot of trouble just fitting in in the community in general. I hung out with my roommates a little bit, who welcomed me, because those were the only people I really knew. I also knew some people from my high school, actually, who came here, a good amount of people from Lowell High School came here. So, I recognized some faces. So that was cool.

I ended up realizing that the colleges don't limit your ability to make friends with people. So, I specifically made friends with people at other colleges. I had to, because all my major classes, like most of the people in my building all had classes together. They'd all walk together in these groups. I didn't have class with anyone in my building except for people who were in my Crown core class with me. So that was fun to have a core class, but it didn't really touch on society the way I would have liked it to. It didn't even talk much about the ethics of technology at the time. So, I was kind of frustrated. This is just reinforcing my idea that Crown is all about technology. They don't really care about society or its impact. Anyway, that's kind of my beginning of my feeling. So, I didn't really feel very good about Santa Cruz until much later, towards the end of my freshman year.

Vanderscoff: So, I'm really interested then in that transformation of how this started to become like a home or a place, even if it is one that you critique. But let's stay a little bit shy of that first and talk about some of those early experiences. One thing is, everyone's entry to UCSC, more or less, who's coming in as a freshman, is the core course. And so if you could talk about the core course and some of those early GEs as introductions to what Santa Cruz was, and then how you took that.

Wildman: I think I was also in a big culture shock, now that I think about it more— [I want to say that before] talking about the GEs and classes—because I never met so many white people, but also upper-class people. So, the way people were talking was different from the way I'd grown up talking. And the way people's experiences were, and my ability to relate to them. So that's also something that made me feel I couldn't connect with people as well. And then the more I started taking those major prerequisite classes, the more I started critiquing them as people. Because I was like wow, they're doing all these things. And I'm engaged in them, too, but I was able to change. But I couldn't explain to them. They would just shut me down and be like, "Well, that's subjective," or whatever. And so, I wasn't able to relay the information I felt like I was learning and engage with it because of the space that I felt limited to at first.

Vanderscoff: What sort of differentials in behavior or in privilege are you alluding to?

Wildman: Yeah. I mean, there are people who'd be like, "Oh, yeah, I paid for someone to fill out my FAFSA so that we would get as much money as possible, but I'm middle upper class." I was like, "What?" (laughs) First of all, I filled out my FAFSA with my family and we took a long time to do it and we aren't getting as much money as this guy was talking about, which is interesting. Stuff like that—privilege with money.

But also thinking about spaces people are from. A lot of people, I think, are from suburban areas, which I was not used to talking about because I grew up in the city. So, people were scared of taking buses and going downtown and they thought downtown was dirty and stuff. I was like, this is funny. And people aren't used to seeing homeless people, which should not be something we're used to seeing; we shouldn't be used to seeing houseless people, but that was something I grew up being used to seeing. So, anyways.

But also differences in terms of people being very focused on getting a job that was well paid. Well paid. That's a big part of—I'm like, "Do you even like coding?" "Well, no, but I know it will get me a good job and we're near Silicon Valley." You're doing all those classes and you

don't like it? Some people really do like coding but I guess I saw a lot of lack of social capabilities in terms of interacting with people. A lot of people were so intertwined in the whole technology stuff, constantly on their phone, playing video games. I'd never see people be people.

So, I was like, I need to find the people people. I knew they were on the campus, because I saw them during summer orientation. But I got kind of caught up in this whole—this isn't the place for me thing.

Academic Experience

Anyways, but then my core course—I think it was good because I did have friends in the building. I wasn't going to be like oh, everyone here sucks. This was interesting for me. And my whole thing was, oh, I'm just providing a different perspective. But I'm the only one in this building, or in a lot of Crown, who has these ideas. So it was kind of weird. But I kept on thinking you know what? This is good for me. It's good to see people being so different compared to my major classes where people are people and we talk to each other and we think about deep concepts and stuff. I know this sounds like I'm being very demeaning towards STEM people, but I don't mean all of STEM. I mean in general, the people I had interactions with. And that's really shaped how I see computer science and it continues with my ideas of technology.

But my core course was great because I had people in it that we could leave the building together and go to class. I couldn't do that like other people could with my other classes. So that was cool. And it was at Crown. Because most of my classes were all the way across campus at Oakes, or Rachel Carson, (or College Eight last year). And so, whereas a lot of people had classes on Science Hill or something. Usually I'd be walking much farther, so it was really exciting for me to just be able to roll out of bed, stay at Crown, and seeing people that I knew

from my building in my classes because I never had that experience in any other class besides core.

My GEs—I took this one class called *Psychology and Religion*, Psych 80A. Everyone told me this is the best class ever, Ralph Quinn, he's amazing. I was like okay, I'm going to take this. It's going to be great. But my mind was not ready for it. Last quarter, *Woman and the Law* was amazing with Gina Dent, amazing. My mind wasn't quite ready for it but it was good. I still learned the little things that I could from it. But taking that my first quarter freshman year was interesting. I wasn't able to apply myself, I think, in that same way, or get what I wished I could have out of the readings or whatever. And keeping up with readings was always difficult for me. But especially the beginning of my freshman year, because I didn't really know how to handle, I don't know, the level of reading, but also just the amount of numbers of pages and how to break it up and how to focus. I couldn't focus in my building community, because so many people were constantly talking about their STEM classes and working together, that I felt really distracted. So that's why sometimes college environments can be limiting. I think there are benefits in terms of creating community but I think they can be limiting as well.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, and I think another interest of this project is talking about that transition from previous education experiences to here— in terms of studying, in terms of dealing with the workload and all that—and then how one adjusts to that, whether there were resources that you found in supporting you with that.

Wildman: Yeah, I've always grown up seeking out things for myself. It's kind of the way I was taught. My mom always does that kind of thing. "You need to advocate for yourself. You have to. Otherwise, you can't get what you need." And so, I definitely sought out a lot of resources on campus. Learning Support Services, LSS, was really helpful to me. I actually tutored for them recently because I see how important that program is to students and it's a great way to learn with each other, collaboratively. Because a big part of the transition here was like, lecture

halls are strange. The professor's on a stage, talking at us. Sometimes it's great, when they engage and ask questions. And you might know some people in the class. But it was a weird experience for me definitely at first. And it still kind of is. I definitely enjoy seminars or small classroom classes much better and feel I can engage better in the material and discussions.

So, Learning Support Services was helpful in the sense that their MSI sessions, which are Modified Supplemental Instruction, which are very small. Some of mine were like five students, maybe. And where another undergraduate student would actually teach us—well, I don't even want to say "teach," but help us go over—it was teaching, but help us go over information that we're learning in the class and discuss it and learn how to engage with it. Find some definitions, some examples in the reading. So that was really helpful for me. And to have a space to hang out with people who were in my major because I couldn't really find people in my college that I could hang out with who were in my major. There were no other sociology majors, or even psychology or anthropology or anything near, or history.

Vanderscoff: And so for the record, your early GE classes—what size are you talking about?

Wildman: So my Psych 80A class, *Psychology and Religion*, was in the Media Theater. It was, I want to say about 400 students. I might be a little wrong, whatever that whole classroom is. But the first couple of weeks, at least, people were sitting on the stairs on the side because all the seats were full. And a lot of that is because people want to get into a class and the class is impacted and they're on the wait-list. Or they're just sitting in on the class. But a good amount of the time, it's one of those classes you have to get to extra early to even *have* a seat. And if you have a friend in any class, you have to get there extra, extra early if you want to find multiple seats together. Or if they can get there early, you can find a seat with them. But anyway, it was definitely a very large class, that class. And I felt myself kind of lost in the whole sea of people.

People were always telling me, "Oh, you have to introduce yourself to the professor. You have to go to office hours." I didn't do that till spring quarter because I was like, "I know, but I haven't done the reading, so what if they ask me something and I don't know the answer?"

So that was one of the classes. I'm trying to think. Oh, the other class I took was Sociology 15, which I loved: *World Society* with Steve McKay. He's amazing. And he's actually one of the professors who made me realize sociology was my thing. I never heard of sociology before coming to university. So that was really exciting for me. He's a really good professor. And that was also in a lecture hall, in the humanities lecture hall, which is also close to 400, maybe closer to 300. I'm not really sure. I'm kind of ballparking it here. But they're definitely large lecture halls. But in both of those classes—in my psych and in my sociology class—I had sections, discussion sections, that were with TAs. I was told those were going to be small TA groups, but they aren't really small, at least, what I think of as small. I want to say 35-ish, maybe 40. Maybe 35. I don't want to overestimate based on how it feels, but it didn't feel very small to me. I'm an outgoing person and I didn't even feel comfortable in a lot of those classes, especially freshman year, asking questions. I thought oh, when it's smaller, I can ask more questions. So especially, I think that psych section was pretty big.

With my sociology section, I was also excited about the class, and I really liked the professor, so I felt more comfortable engaging in the discussion sections. Those were really important for me, in terms of going over the material and discussing the material. I looked forward to discussion sections. But I still question why we don't get units for them. Because I have so many friends who are taking labs and getting units from them, one or two units. And they literally in their labs just do their homework. And their grade is the same grade as in the larger class, which is the same as in a discussion section. I said, "In the discussion section we get assigned more sometimes." We do projects or we'll do some kind of presentation or, you know have to write something or whatever. Extra stuff, usually. But some people's labs it is extra assignments and lab work. But some people's labs, for instance, programming lab, you just program during your

lab and then you get units for it. So that's just something I think about a good amount of the time. Because those labs are oftentimes optional and all my discussion sections were mandatory.

Later on, I tried to take my first math class, I took Math 3 last fall, but then I withdrew. That was really different for me because I went to the discussion section ready to discuss stuff. And it wasn't a discussion. It was, "Hi. Do you want to introduce each other to each other? 'Well, I mean, you can just say your names really quick. Okay. Fine." You know, (laughs) normally we take a while for introductions and we actually care about each other. And then as soon as that happened, just like, "Okay. Now we're going to do problems on the board." And no time to ask questions or think about things deeper. And it's just this, "Because that's how it is." And memorizing. And I was like, oh, no, this is not a discussion section, how I know it. And I asked my friends who are STEM majors, I was like, "Is this how your discussions are?" They're like, yeah. I was like, what?! And I didn't realize that until I took a math discussion section, to realize that "discussion section" means very different things for very different people, like different majors. So, it was something interesting.

Majoring in Sociology

Vanderscoff: So if you're starting to suss out some of these differences, then, between more humanistic, and then certain social scientific classes, and then more lab-based natural science classes, I'm curious in that mix, then, what pushed you toward sociology? If you can just walk us through the story of you going with that major.

Wildman: I love sociology. It's perfect. (laughs) I was undeclared when I first came to UC Santa Cruz. I was undeclared, though, within one of those groupings, or whatever. I think it was probably human psychology/history, something like that. It was like all the social studies ones that weren't political, really, but also weren't artistic, really. Like the liberal arts stuff that was more focused on studying people. Well, I guess all liberal arts are people. But anyway, I was

pretty set on psychology, because that's all I knew, really. I knew psychology and history. And I was like oh, but I like psychology more because I like to really see how people work with each other. History's super important and I love history. But I really like something about the way people work together. But as I took more psych classes and thought about it more, I realized that psych is more about individuals. And the way you go about psychology seemed very Western to me, after I started to learn more about it, in terms of the ways that it looks at individual behaviors and individual mind things.

I realized the part of psych that I found most interesting was social psych. And sociology isn't the same as social psych, but it definitely looks more into people's interactions with each other in communities and larger institutional structures. And that's something that I needed so badly to learn about. Because I was like, why are all these smaller things happening? I was experiencing and seeing all these symptoms and all these individual-level experiences for me and other people but I needed to have some way to figure out some of the roots of these things and be able to analyze them and critique them.

I also love how sociology is a lot about history. Some people are like oh, it's the biography and history. So, you get to see individual's experiences in a historical context, and also look at the larger systems in play. It's a field where it allows for a lot of critique, and through methodologies that are very open. It just feels like a very open field. There are so many different things that I'd love to do within it. I feel like I'm doing my everyday life that way, if that makes sense.

Vanderscoff: It does, it does. So, within that, are there any particular classes or assignments or projects that were key in you coming to this feeling that you now have about Soc?

Wildman: Yeah. Definitely Soc 15, *World Society*. I guess a specific experience that made me think about Soc was during summer orientation they had advising clusters. And I was like, "I don't know what to do. I'm undeclared. What do I do? What do I do?"

So, I chose a couple. One of them I chose was history. There were five people in that advising cluster because it's a very small department, or pretty small in comparison to other departments here on campus. And then I went to the sociology one, and I think I was thinking of going to something else. Or I went to psychology and then I left, or something, I forget. But I went to the sociology one. And Steve McKay, my professor for Soc 15, well, coming professor, was speaking. He was talking about his personal experience about how his name is white-passing, but how he's mixed Filipino and white. And I was like, whoa, me, too! And not only are each of our names white-passing, but our appearances are as well. And so, I was like oh my gosh, I get to talk about this in sociology? I get to explain and understand and go deeply into these things that I've been experiencing and thinking about, but for school? That's super great.

So, I really related to him, and I was amazed by how people just opened up, and how normal that was to just share these really personal situations because they matter on a much deeper level. And just because of the connection that that brings. I guess I felt already like this is really great, this is really real.

The history advising cluster, I really liked it, too. And I was like oh, I'm going to get a lot of time with the advisor, because she's really engaged, and I can ask all these questions. And it sounds like she really knows her stuff. She was saying, rather than picking up all these majors, we should study abroad. That's totally—I feel the same way. Because I'm not trying to pick up all these majors. I don't want an advisor telling me that. My high school advisors would always tell me to take more AP classes, and I didn't like that. I was like, "I'm not taking AP English. I don't even like English. Why would I do that?"

But what really reaffirmed that was me taking Sociology 10 winter quarter. That's *Issues and Problems in American Society*. And I love that class with Deborah Gould. And Deborah Gould, I've taken again, because I love her. She's an amazing professor and activist. Anyway, so that class was me taking US history again through a lens of sociology and critiquing it. And some

things just blew my mind—like thinking about how it was a freedom to own slaves at certain times, just our idea of freedom. And all these things, I was like, "How is this? This is so awful. How did this happen?" It's like oh, this happened because people said this, or did this. Or this was a dominant idea at the time. Or this was written. Or people tried to use science to prove that race is real. And all these things. So, it was really important for me, especially in *Issues and Problems in American Society,* to look at race and gender and all these things. We learned a lot about the structures of race in the beginnings of the US, specifically. And that was something that was really interesting to me. In the beginning of US history, a lot of times people talk about the founding fathers and stuff. And I was so happy that instead it was looking at Thomas Jefferson, how he owned slaves. Just all the hypocrisy, but it wasn't seen as hypocrisy, because people's definitions of things were different. And just thinking about different people's paradigms at different times, and trying to understand that. Because I still—I was so amazed, especially at the university campus, I realized these issues were so much deeper than I thought they were even growing up. Because I could see the vast array of how it's affecting so many different people, all these issues. So, I really wanted to know: how can people think these things? And so, looking back through history in the US, that was really helpful. And that class has helped me think about this current time that we're in, this era. So, I think that that's really important to take that class.

Honestly, I tell everyone, "You need to take these classes." Because if people don't take Soc 10, they're going to think US history is how US history is taught in high school. They're going to think it's all about the founding fathers. They're going to think that the civil rights movement happened, but it's all about the peaceful protests, it's all about fitting into these boxes that education, propaganda, wants us to see history as being just like, yeah—anyways. (laughs)

So those two classes really made me want to do sociology. And also, the advisor, Tina, for sociology, was so nice. I had so many positive interactions with people in those classes as well. I just felt I could talk to someone in the class and we could understand each other. Even if we

came from really different backgrounds, we still cared about things and we still wanted to make changes. There's some passion and realness to that. In other classes, there wasn't that passion or that openness.

Vanderscoff: And a question I've been asking people throughout this project is on assessment. Because when I was here, there were still mandatory narrative evaluations in many classes. So, the professors would write a paragraph about you at the end, sort of assessing, sort of summing up your work. So, I'm curious whether those are still around in any way. And then if not, if you can comment on letter grades, and in general the assessments and feedback that you get from faculty and how that relates to the thinking and work that you've just described doing.

Wildman: Yeah, so we don't get, or I have never received in my time at UC Santa Cruz any kind of written grading thing. Unfortunately—that would be great. I think that grades do not help learning, as much as knowing about what specifically that grade stands for. It's just a letter. How can that help anyone? So, my whole thing was, oh, maybe in discussion sections we'll get more feedback. But if a TA, who's also doing graduate student work, research, has at least thirty, thirty-five students in one section, and they probably have multiple sections, they can't really be giving that much feedback. There's a lot being put on them that they're not being paid for. And so, part of that was realizing oh, I'm just going to turn in a final paper and then I get a grade on it for my final. There's no rough drafts. There's no, can you check this, see how I'm doing? I mean, I could have probably gone to office hours. I didn't feel like I could have, I guess, personally I wasn't ready for that. But I literally could have.

So that's part of the reason why MSI was really helpful for me, because I would get feedback and I'd get affirmation that I was understanding things. Because I had no idea if I was understanding things. But a lot of soc professors teach really well. And there's a lot of participation involved in whatever ways they count; it's kind of an in-class, quick reflection or writing assignment you turn in. And I feel like when we're getting some kind of recognition for

our presence, I feel like oh, they care more for some reason. And when something's optional, and people just go in and go out, I feel you aren't being really cared for as a student.

I feel like a lot of soc classes—I felt, oh, my professor cares about me. Even if they didn't know me personally, I felt like they cared, because they cared about the issues I cared about. But that's kind of sad, when you think about it. It is pretty sad. And part of that is also the reality of the majority of universities right now, and the privatization of education, and just overcrowding, and numbers, and capitalism.

The class that I got the most feedback on was my core class, probably. But I didn't like the feedback and I didn't feel I was being listened to, or being responded to well. So, I didn't find that helpful.

Vanderscoff: In the sense of your ideas, or in the sense of—

Wildman: Yeah, I felt like I was being told that my writing had to be how they wanted my writing to be. And right now, I'm taking my Writing 2 class. This is my last quarter to be able to take it. But I love it so much, because it's criticizing what I learned in my core class and it's saying that there are all forms of writing. There's different contexts and different rhetorical situations where you're going to be writing in different ways. But that doesn't make one kind of writing [better] from another kind of writing. There's no hierarchy of that. But really, in that core class, we would meet with our core teacher. There would be three of us in a room. And she would bring up our essays on a Google doc and type in comments. Or like, talk to us really fast and we'd have to type in comments and change it. I don't really like doing writing on technology and I don't really like editing really fast on a Google drive. That's not helpful. But I understood that her time was limited. So, it's kind of why you're stuck in this kind of position. Can you ask for that much more? You also have to recognize the situation they're in. But we are paying for tuition. So, it's complicated. But that doesn't mean that we can't change it or figure out better ways.

In my discussion sections, sometimes I'd get feedback, but it wasn't deep feedback of my writing, or of my thinking. A lot of my feedback was my reflections of what I was learning. And a lot of my feedback was my ability to apply it in my everyday life. Because every class just shakes up my mind. Every good soc or feminist studies or politics class I've taken shakes up my mind, and then it changes the way I act in my everyday life. I know that's different from grades, but it's the way that the class—I feel like I learn from it.

I guess because I'm really passionate about subjects and because of my privileges and like writing, and a lot of reflection kind of writing in my K through eight and stuff like that, and English being my first language, I find that I end up getting pretty good grades. Even when I don't do all the readings, I am able to put it into context with the other classes I'm taking and think deeply about it. I've come to a realization that I can't do all my readings, ever, basically because there's so many of them. So, I pick and choose some of them and I get really deep into them. I annotate them and think about them. But anyway, that's just the learning skill that I'm thinking about.

Grades-wise, I wish that we had more feedback on how we were doing. But I think that this Writing 2 class that I'm taking right now, I'm getting a lot of feedback. And the professor, Dr. Lisa Schilz, is amazing. I think it's really helping my writing skills, even though I was upset that I had to take Writing 2, because I've been taking upper-division social studies classes. I'm like, why do I have to take Writing 2 still? Because I didn't take AP English in high school, because I didn't want to take AP English. (laughs) And I was upset, too, because Crown 80A and 80B were like two courses. One of them was for people who had satisfied the AP requirements; one was for people who didn't. They were taught by the same professor and we did basically the same stuff. And it was like, why are they getting Writing 2 credit, C2 credit? I was like, that seems unfair! And I was like okay, wait, you know what? That's important, especially for some majors who don't really do much writing. Taking a writing class is really important. But then I was like, I was a writing tutor! Why do I need this? That was just my mindset going into it

because this quarter I have to take only this many units and I need to figure out what classes I'm going to sign up for. I can't wait for some of these classes because what if they're more impacted later on? I need to sign up for them. But as soon as I've been taking it, I realized that I can really go back and work on my writing skills a lot more.

So anyway, I think there are a lot of classes, the smaller classes, I've gotten feedback on.

Vanderscoff: That's great to hear. So, I want to spend a good amount of time talking about some of your advocacy and activism. Just before we get to that, you mentioned a little while ago that it took you some time to locate yourself, or situate yourself in this place?

Wildman: Mm hmm.

Vanderscoff: And that's regarding Crown, and then that's UCSC in general. And that changed toward the end of your freshman year. I think you perhaps started alluding to this by talking about your engagement with soc, but could you say a little bit more about how that change happened?

Wildman: Yeah. This is pretty personal stuff. But I was in an abusive relationship starting from the beginning of my freshman year. Winter quarter, I kept on trying to end it. So, it was spring quarter when I was able to explore on my own and be able to do stuff, and kind of live happily and also just feel in control of what I was doing. And so, that was part of the reason that my growth was stunted, because it kind of fed off of my like, I don't fit in at Crown, so I'm going to hang out at Oakes all the time where you're at, because no one at Crown likes me or cares about me, and I can't connect with them anyway. So, then all my friends become your friends.

That was a really bad time for me, in the sense that I didn't really feel very connected to the people on campus. I was trying to do my classes, but I couldn't really focus on them or really be present. I was missing a lot of the things that I wanted to be involved in.

Student Government

But I was involved in Crown Student Senate, which is student government for the specific college, starting my freshman year. At Welcome Week, I think they had some kind of ice cream social, and people were like, "Oh, you should join Crown Student Senate." And I was like, "Student government? I love student government! I tried to run for student government in high school and I didn't make it." I spent so long prepping. I ran for VP, but what ended up happening is the person who won VP in my high school won because all her friends wanted her to and they set up stuff so that she could win. Anyways, high school. (laughs) You know? But also, government and corruption.

But anyway, so I was like okay, I really want to get involved in student government. So that was something that made me feel more aware of what was going on on campus, and specifically in the Crown community. I was a representative for my building, which is funny, because probably, looking back at it, I don't know how well I represented each individual or what they would have said to these opinions, because I honestly was really trying to represent my values. But how many representatives actually represent their constituents? Anyway, that's another point to make.

But I think it was really important for me to feel connected to the university. And from Crown student senate, I knew about different events happening all over campus. So, I went to those programs. There are so many great programs always happening. The Women's Center, or AAPIRC, or someone will be putting on some really exciting program. and I'll want to go. So, finding out about that through Crown Student Senate helped me feel really engaged and part of the university, as well as being involved in some student groups.

I only went to a couple SJP meetings at the end of my freshman year. And then I went to some MESH meetings as well. And that was really important for me. I was like, MESH? That exists? There's a Mixed Ethnicity Student Headquarters? I think there are a lot more mixed people than

people think. But also, there aren't oftentimes ethnic resources or student organizations specifically made for mixed folks, even though we're one of the fastest growing populations in the US. So, to have a space to talk about those situations and experiences was really awesome for me.

So, I definitely looked outside of Crown to find those kind of experiences. And those experiences tied me into the university more. But Crown also did in its own ways, and my conflict with technology and with STEM majors and with computer science majors. I mean, now I'm an RA at Crown. I feel very connected to Crown College. It's a complicated relationship, though. (laughs)

Self-Care

Vanderscoff: So for a variety of factors—you get out of an abusive relationship; you start getting involved in Crown. And as far as the mechanisms that allowed you to do that, again, I'm curious about what resources or mechanisms of self-care supported you in that process of getting more engaged with your community, getting out of this negative situation, and then ultimately, I mean, if I'm understanding you right, starting to locate yourself here at UCSC.

Wildman: Yeah, definitely. I think winter quarter I realized okay, my mental health is not good. I was pretty sure I was going through some kind of depression or traumatic kind of whatever after. And so, I went to CAPS, which is the Counseling and Psychological Services. I had a really bad experience there. They basically told me that what I was going through wasn't as bad as what other students were going through. For CAPS appointments, first you have to get up the guts to call them or go in. Then you have to call them. Then you have to set an appointment to have a phone call. And then you have to be the person to call the psychologist or psychiatrist or therapist and do the whole intake, whatever, because they don't have enough time, or place, or money or whatever to see you—that's what they tell you, right—in person. So, your first appointment is on the phone. And sometimes that takes a week or two weeks to

schedule after you call in, or come the first time. That's already very difficult and a lot of hurdles to get over.

And then, you maybe get an appointment in real life after that phone call. And the first part of it, before you even do the phone call stuff, is you fill out this thing saying basically, are you going to kill yourself or someone else. All these major—has someone just died in your life? The whole thing is it's supposed to see how critical of a situation you're in, but it makes you feel the situation you're in is less critical. Because they're like, "Resources are limited." Which they really shouldn't be because mental health actually on UC Santa Cruz, on this campus, is definitely worse. We have higher numbers of everything compared to other UCs.

So, then I saw someone and they basically told me [my problems weren't as bad as other students']. We had one appointment and then I was gone. So that wasn't going to help me.

But my residential assistants, my RAs, one of them was really friendly. And she externally was more similar to me. But I was able to connect more with one of my RAs. He was an astrophysics major and he recently graduated. He definitely was kind of a mentor to me in a lot of ways. It was funny because I would go to him for help with thinking about things and he would point to my psychology book and be like, "You're the one studying psychology, right?"

And I was like, "Yeah, that doesn't mean I understand my own stuff that's happening to me." And I guess that was really helpful because he told me, "Oh, yeah, you can do this. You can be an RA." And I was like, "Oh, but the application—I only have two days to fill it out." Because I told him, I want to do all these things, but I can't, and I don't have enough time." Same with summer orientation later. So, he really pushed me to apply for these jobs. Because he was like, "Oh, yeah, I think you'd be great at it." I was like, "Really? I feel like I'm not quite ready for that, or I'm not in the right mental state to be able to be that responsible for other people." But he really pushed me to do that.

Also, me doing the things that I enjoy, when I had more time to myself. So, working out, eating better, talking to people, being outside. Just basic things. I think the eating and the sleeping—no one thinks that in college that's going to be that difficult, because you're an adult by that time, but one of the biggest things is coming to college and figuring out your whole schedule, at least for me, is like yeah, I need to eat and sleep, and basic needs need to be met. And those aren't always met. So anyway, doing that kind of thing.

But something else that really helped me was I became more involved in the Muslim Student Association and with Muslim students on this campus in general, that really helped me in terms of finding myself and feeling community space that I was involved in, and invited and welcomed into in a very loving way. That helped me find, set myself back on a path again of sorts. That was really good for me.

I think also getting to know a lot of people in different colleges was really good for me. because as soon as I got out of that relationship, I was able to build friendships and get to know people and become more of who I am, which is more extroverted and wanting to connect with people. But I wasn't really able to do that before. So that definitely helped me.

Another thing that was really major was taking a strength training class. I've been taking physical education courses since last winter because of this. And I can't stop. Because I need to, I need to have at least one class. I told myself fall quarter of freshman year oh, yeah, I'll go to the gym, I'll work out. But compared to high school, where I had basketball practices every day and on the weekends, and I had tournaments, that was just really weird for my body to switch into not working out. Whereas people were losing weight because they're walking up hills, I was like, I am gaining so much weight and I don't feel healthy or in shape. So anyway, I took a woman's strength training class with Cindy, Cynthia Mori. She is a life changer. She is so positive. She's sixty years old and she's the shining light of positivity, and like you can do it, believe in yourself, all this stuff. She was my therapist, because CAPS didn't give that to me,

and therapist through body, mind, soul, heart. Like everything. She really connects it all. Because it all is connected. I think PE teachers are just really important people in general, if they're good, because the way your body moves and connecting that to your breathing and your ideas and your mind, can be a really positive way to heal. And then feeling strong, too, feeling in charge of my body, and like I could get really strong. All that stuff. And also, being surrounded by other women who also want to do that. It was a really motivating, inspiring place. And she is amazing. I usually go up to her after class, "You're amazing. You've changed my life. You have no idea." I've taken her class since this last winter quarter. That's the women's strength training class. I've also taken her yoga and other classes. But this is the first quarter I'm actually not taking her class because of my schedule, unfortunately. But I am taking still a folk dancing class. So, I try to always take some sort of PE class, to make sure that I do go to OPERS. Because I love going there. I just need to have a push to go there, with my schedule I need to have a set aside time, and taking a class helps. Especially because you pay for it a little, so then you're like, oh, I really can't miss my class. (laughs)

Residential Assistant

Vanderscoff: So we can actually keep going in that same direction, because this leads us into talking about your work as an RA and your work with the Muslim student Association. So maybe we can start talking about your work as an RA, that entrée into your Crown community. I was an RA when I was here.

Wildman: Oh, really?

Vanderscoff: Yeah.

Wildman: Cool.

Vanderscoff: And so the question I'm asking other RAs who I've been talking to, is there's sort of a policy part of the job. And then there's a programming part of the job, the social part. And

then there's a health part of the job, which is people's academic health, but then also their mental health and their physical health and all that. So, I'm curious, then if you could talk about your role in the community in terms of the training you received in those things, and the practice that you've found.

Wildman: Yeah. I was really happy that I got the Crown RA job, especially because I was like now okay, so now the Crownies who are social studies majors or activists or people of color, or anyone who's not a white man who's a STEM major, because that's the majority, or white man who's a CS major, that is the majority of Crownies, especially freshman year—then the STEM majors start to go down and it balances out better for the graduating class in terms of demographics, statistics, which is interesting. It goes from 75 or 80, to 50, in terms of STEM majors. But I was really excited to be that kind of role model and that kind of person that would be like, "Oh, no, stay here. If you're a social studies major, you need to stay here." I wanted to tell people to stay here. Because I was worried. What if Crown College only becomes CS and CE majors? That's really possible. And that would be so sad. Because I think about how much learning we learn from each other and our everyday interactions. And if you're only learning the same things in your everyday interactions that you are in your classes, or something that matches with that, you're never going to grow or be challenged in the way of how you go about life.

So, I was really happy to get the position, especially because my RAs had also helped me through a lot of things. So, I was super lucky. And then I went through the training process—so I'm just going to be really blunt. The Crown RA staff is super white. And that made me feel really strange, especially because the administrators are men, and a lot of the Crown RA staff are also either very conservative or center left, whereas I'm very far left. So that was really an interesting thing. And also, they don't really care that much because they can afford to not care about a lot of issues right now. So that's something that's been really hard for me. But also

during training, that was really hard for me. So, I didn't really connect much with the Crown RA staff.

But I did connect with some of the Merrill RA staff. That was really cool. Still no soc majors, but Merrill RA staff had some social studies majors. So, I was able to talk about like oh, you're interested in this, too? Because I'm not saying that your major, you can't relate to people. It was more just my passions and interests. But definitely training was really important to me in terms of thinking about what I would actually be doing as an RA. Because at first, I was like, I don't really know what I'm going to be doing. I just know this is my position and I'll be there for my residents. And I'm excited. So, training really was helpful in terms of thinking about what are we physically going to be doing, Behind Closed Doors? I'm assuming you did something like that through your training.

Vanderscoff: Behind Closed Doors. (laughs)

Wildman: Yeah. So that was pretty intense. We had those kind of days where you have intense situations and you have to respond to those situations. I learned a lot. I mean, there were definitely parts of training that I wish we would have spent more time on, or some things I wish we would have spent less time on. Our diversity training was very short. And then afterwards, a lot of the RAs were like, "I just feel bad about being white." I'm like, "That's not the point of diversity training. There's more. And you need to think about the situations your residents will be in and how to relate to them." You know, much more broader stuff. 'So, I guess sometimes I feel kind of stuck at the point where it's like oh, I feel like I'm getting something out of this, but wait, how are other people not getting something out of this? And trying to figure out how I can have this discussion without sounding like, "I can't believe it!" Just go, "Oh, that's interesting you say that." And just take a deep breath and calm down. And then do some calling in and do some talking. Because I'm learning, too. And so, to learn together.

Training was interesting. I definitely enjoy the job more than training. I love being an RA because I love the idea of building community, which is something that people throw around a lot, like, "building community." But I really do. And it's definitely happened in the building. I'm a co-RA with someone else and we're in the social justice building, which I was really happy about being assigned to because all the other buildings are like gaming, or like academic. I was in the academic building [as a student]. So, I was really lucky. And I was like okay, I'm going to do as much social justice as I can. I'm going to show people that that's what Crown's about. Because it says "society" there. That's what UC Santa Cruz is about. Why can't Crown be like that?

So, I really got big on social justice programs, but also on doing little things in the newsletter, putting activist of the month, and giving some information on an activist. And doing little things, too, like asking the custodian if I could take a picture of him, talking to him, asking if there's anything he wants the residents to know and putting that up as a picture in the bathroom. Because I heard that last year people had called the CSOs, the campus safety officers, because they thought someone was coming into the building—they didn't know them, but they were scared. But it was really a custodian.

So, a lot of these things, I was like okay, now I can make the changes that I really wanted to make. I'm going to do all the little things. Like in the bathroom, when it says, "Don't flush down feminine products," I'm not going to use the word "feminine products." I'm just going to say, "Don't flush tampons and pads." You know? So, I was able to make the changes that I was constantly seeing. So, in that sense, I had the power. I was able to act and make changes that had been kind of irritating to me, even on a low-key level.

So I love the job for that reason, but I also love the job for being there for residents. Because you can tell how thankful they are sometimes after you have a conversation with them. Because freshman year is tough. Freshman year is hard. And a lot of people don't have friends until

much later and sometimes your RA is the only person you can talk to. I know that so much. So, I think that it's a really satisfying, fulfilling position.

In terms of enforcing policy, that's, I don't know, that's probably my least favorite part of the job. It's weird. It's a weird place to be in because you're a student, too, right? And it's weird because people know that people do drugs on campus. You can't stop that completely. So as RAs, though, we're just documenting. We're not technically making the decision. But you do make the decision of when to document or not and all RAs do that differently. At Crown College in particular, there is not a lot of documentation or write-ups, especially drug-related. So, I've been pretty lucky that my job hasn't been as focused on drug stuff; it's been more focused on me being able to put on these programs and events and shape a curriculum of residential education that is really important to me, and important to, I think, to the time period that we're in. I purposely put in the last newsletter I wrote that UC has legal services, that you can talk to immigration lawyers. Because a lot of people are scared about a lot of things in this time in terms of so many undocumented students, so many students who are scared about their safety. So being able to do that is really great. But still, it's not enough because this is only in my building (laughs) and other RAs aren't being held to this responsibility.

So, I bump into a lot of arguments and difficult conversations with my bosses, for sure, because I'm always wanting to try to do things that to them are very clearly not neutral. But I'm a social studies major, so I know that there's no such thing as neutrality.

Vanderscoff: I understand that you currently have this job, but to whatever extent you'd like to comment on something being perceived as neutral versus non-neutral.

Wildman: Yeah, I'd love to. I also do spoken word and that's something that's been really healing for me as well. But I wrote a poem on this. I've been asked to do a lot of things and told a lot of things that really frustrate me. One of them is that I wanted to have a program specifically for people being affected negatively by the 45th and his policies. And that to me is a

very concrete, clear thing. And it's true, some people are not going to be affected negatively by his policies, so they were like, "Well, you're not including the entire community. What if a Trump supporter wants to go?" And there are Trump supporters who I work with on staff at Crown, so it's difficult in that sense. And it's difficult because there are Crown College students who are also Trump supporters. And it's really hard, because when you're trying to create a community, you want it to be inclusive and safe. And you can't really, in my opinion, create an inclusive and safe community if you aren't addressing the students whose safety and identity is being violated and, basically, yeah, they're being targeted. Or we're being targeted.

So, I was asking to do that kind of thing. And it's like well, if you're going to do that, then you also have to have a program for Trump supporters. The whole argument is because we're federally funded, we have to be neutral. But to me, I'm like, we're federally funded? Does that mean we should follow what the federal government tells us to do? So, there's a lot of hypocrisy and there's a lot of difference between colleges. Because different RAs at different colleges would be totally fine. At College Nine, Ten or Oakes, you could totally have a program like that and it would be totally fine. So, it depends on who your boss is. It depends on what their philosophies are. It depends on how much they stick to what they think are the rules. So those kind of situations have come up.

Also, situations where—there was recently a graffiti incident, last quarter, I think it was in a joking—I'm pretty sure it was someone kind of making a joke about something. But they graffitied "White Devil," and then "Gringos get out." So, kind of in response, like flipping it. So, then Crown College sent out these emails to us saying, "There's been a major racial discriminatory incident," la, la, la. So, then they brought it up at our RA staff meeting. They were like, "Make space for—like a lot of RAs have come to me, because a lot of the RAs are white and so they feel they're being personally affected by this. So, a lot of the RAs have come to me and have been concerned about this graffiti, so feel free to make spaces for your residents if you think they need that. Do whatever you think they need." (laughter)

And after that meeting I was like, we just spent a good amount of time talking about this graffiti. I understand that it is discrimination; it is targeting white people. But reverse racism does not exist. It wouldn't be the same as if it was not white people. And they never had us discuss anything after the elections or after the inauguration. And I feel part of this is them trying to step carefully because there's a Trump supporter on staff. But part of them is also that they don't see how wrong the situation's political time we're in is, which is really frustrating for me.

And I've been told, "You can do that program as Sabina, but not as an RA." I'm like, since when can you separate yourself entirely from your job, especially in this day and age. So, then I was like, "I am Sabina and I'm an RA. How can I—"

And in terms of programming, so now I do things a little less clear. So, I'll just be like, "Oh, we're just having a meeting to discuss recent events in the building." Because a lot of cops had been coming into the building one week. And instead I was, "Okay, so, you all, I'm just going to let you know. I'm kind of scared of cops. I don't like cops coming into the building. That doesn't feel like a safe community to me. So, let's figure out things as a community that we can talk about sorting things out."

Vanderscoff: They were coming in over—again, you can't divulge details.

Wildman: Yeah. So, there are health and safety checks, mental health checks, like 5150s that were happening in the building. You know how RA life is. It's pretty crazy. A lot of scary, intense stuff happens. And then there were also cops coming in for little things. A student was drunk, for instance, and they called 911, but cops came first before the paramedics. Just little things like that, and just recognizing that not everyone feels safe around cops. And I told them, "I want to know if there are cops in the building. Because as an RA, I am not notified of a lot of these things." And even my bosses are like, "We don't know, but we heard that the cops took one of your residents the other day." That scared the shit out of me, especially in this day and

age. I was like, "Were they undocumented, or were they Muslim? What are they doing to my resident? I care about them and how do you not know what they're doing?"

"Well, usually the cops don't let us know." But I'm like, "This is suspicious." "Well, usually they don't tell." I'm like, "This scares me. How can I explain it to you? I can't explain it to you. So then having these conversations with my boss, it's like, "Well, there are a lot of nice cops." I'm like, "That's not what I'm saying. I'm talking about the impact people have."

Anyway, those little things I've definitely been pushing up against. They say they appreciate all the social justice programs I put on, but it's always like, "Well, you can do your social justice programs, but the rest of us are just going to do whatever we want to do as programs. If that's having a game night or food or karaoke. But for us, it's not as important as for you, so you can do that." Which is fine, because I love having the freedom to be able to do that. But I also wish there were higher levels of expectations. And furthermore, I don't feel the support in the same way for what I'm doing. Because it's kind of like, "Okay, you can do that. What do you need from me? You can do that." Those kinds of questions. But not like, "Oh, that's really great. I'm so glad that you're doing that. And I can give you this, so that you can do a better program, or maybe you want to reach out to these people." So, there's no support-support. I got rehired at Crown College and I was really thankful for that. I love the RA job and I love working with residents and creating community and I think that's so important. But I turned it down because I also applied to the Village, so I'm going to be a Village RA, which I'm super pumped about.

Vanderscoff: Oh, so was I.

Wildman: Really?

Vanderscoff: I was also an RA in the Village, for the record, yeah.

Wildman: Cool. So, it's been ups and downs but I have met some other RAs on staff who I can kind of talk to. But they're apartment RAs, rather than res hall RAs, so it's a little different. But

anyhoo, I am very lucky this year. I have so many great friends who are so supportive and so many important members of so many different communities that I'm part of, who check in, and we talk and stuff. So, I'm not feeling as bad. If that would have happened to me and I had no friends, this would have been really difficult. But I have the support and I do feel UC Santa Cruz is a home, in a sense. But it's still very frustrating to deal with having issues at a job where you feel you don't have the ability to do what you feel is needed, especially in a time like this.

For instance, there were "restorative justice circles," which were not actually restorative justice circles. I put that in quotes, because they think it's restorative justice, but it's not. Which I learned in another one of my classes—they're just circles where you talk about stuff. They had it after the elections. They were like, so anyone who wants to come, come to this restorative justice circle and discuss how you feel after the elections. And some Trump supporters came. So, people went there being sad and scared for their families and their lives. And they went there. Then there were Trump supporters, who just dug it in deeper and made people feel a lot worse. And I had residents who went to that meeting who were specifically really targeted and upset about this whole situation, who I talked to afterwards. And they were like, "Yeah, I didn't realize there were going to be Trump supporters there. I was hoping it was going to be a healing space or a safe space for me, and it really wasn't." And I was like, oh my gosh, they allowed Trump supporters in. Because you know, "We allow anyone." Their idea of equality is equality based on sameness. But we're not the same; we're not treated the same, so you need to have some sort of equality base noticing and recognizing difference.

So, my resident and I, we were talking. And basically, I was like wow, this is really bad. I need to host something that's specifically for people who are being affected in this negative way. But I haven't been able to, because of that whole issue of neutrality and open to everyone, unless I hosted a Trump supporter program, which I'm not going to host.

So, I've been doing it through other ways. I'm starting to work with my friend. She's the main leader of this Social Justice Sundays, for just having time to sit down and talk and stuff, basically, about what's been going on in our lives, what we're scared about, current events. I'm hoping to invite some of my residents to that. Kind of like, as a, you can do this, this is not RA Sabina, this is Sabina in her personal life kind of thing. So, going around those lines of what's allowed.

Vanderscoff: So I think this dynamic is something we're going to explore in some of the other things that we'll talk about. So, if that's that particular RA thread and how that dynamic played out with you and the Crown administration, the Crown staff, I'd like to turn to another one of your key areas of involvement, which you also mentioned was a key part of you finding a place here in Santa Cruz, which is the Muslim Student Association. I wonder if you could just talk a little bit about getting involved in that organization, and then its significance to you. Then we'll move on to talk about its work.

Muslim Student Association

Wildman: Yeah. Okay. So, growing up—I guess this is just important for a little background. So, I'm mixed race and I'm also, I don't know what people call it. I'm mixed religious background. So, my dad grew up Protestant Christian; my mom grew up Sunni Muslim. But they really aren't clashing in my beliefs, ideas-wise. I grew up with both of that, in terms of celebrations, in terms of values, in terms of whatever—how I went about my life. So, I grew up with that mix, but I wasn't ever specifically referring to myself as being some kind of religious denomination. And I don't think the rest of my family really identify—well, it's complicated, I guess, especially being in the US, in terms of Islam. In my mom's life in Pakistan it's almost built into everyday life culturally, just part of it. Like prayers. Or whatever it was, just how people are with each other. Alms giving, all the things. And so, it's very different to come to the US and have to really go out of your way to practice a religion. But thinking about different

ways that you can practice a religion—there are a lot of Christians, for instance, who don't go to church, who refer to themselves as Christians, or will celebrate Christmas. So, I guess we're kind of one of those groups of people, but in terms of Muslims. And that's something that a lot of people don't know exists, or understand, because when they see someone who they think is Muslim, they assume that they're the most conservative, traditional (laughs)—I don't know, that word "traditional" is interesting.

So, coming to Santa Cruz, I realized, wow, there are some Muslim students. I know, because there's some hijabis. That's pretty cool because growing up, I didn't really see that many. Because in San Francisco, when I was there—now there's more Saudis and more people coming—so it's changing a little, but it was mostly South San Francisco, where desi, or South Asian, or where Arab or other Muslim folks were living. So, I didn't really grow up with a lot of Muslim community, besides my mom's family, which is huge. So that was always a big Muslim party, I guess.

So, coming here, I met some people—I would go to programs and events that I'd find out through student government-related things. There was a whole week, I think the Women's Center put on, probably with MSA—this movie about different women and specifically talking about their life stories, and why they wear hijabs and what it means to them. And it's very different for everyone, for many people. And so, going to events like that and then meeting people from MSA and talking to them. Kind of like, "Oh, you're in MSA? That's super cool. Let me know when the next event is happening." And I went to another event, like Islam 101, kind of talking about the basic. I was like, oh, that makes sense. Because I've been kind of talked at, but I hadn't been talked at in a point, point, point way because I didn't go to any kind of religious schooling. So, it's interesting how you can kind of take on stuff without thinking of it as being religious doctrination.

Anyway, so there were also some talks on Islam—I think it was Islam and Donald Trump and ISIS or something. It was just talking about a lot of current events. And there was a person who went there who was like, "But all Muslims are terrorists!" Anyway, so there was a lot of interesting stuff that happened. But at those events, I would meet more people from MSA and I'd be like, "Wow, you're so great. Let's hang out sometime." And then I started to go to more MSA events.

And then I officially said my Sahaba, what's the word—conversion to Islam. I know in different religions they do it very differently. But basically, it's just a line that you say with real intention to practice that faith. And MSA was so supportive of me. They made this whole celebration. And it was a halaqa, a talk about religion. We prayed. Then I said my Sahaba, then did the halaqa, and it was like, pizza! It was just really sweet. Everyone was really embracing of me right away. And that's how I felt even before I said that. It was one of the most loving, non-judgmental groups of people that I've ever talked to, to the point where I'm just like, wow, I just want to hang out with this group of people all the time. But then I'm like, oh, wait, no. It's really important to get outside to question and deal with people who are difficult to deal with.

So anyways, so I guess I learned a lot about myself, more through that way. I found a lot more hope and happiness and comfort and like part of something bigger. And community—a huge part of community on campus. It was similar to an ethnic org in a way, too, because there are a lot of South Asians, like Pakistanis. I was like, oh, here we have some similarities—you can talk about food, family, whatever. But mostly, for me, it really felt good to start over. Technically when you do convert, you kind of start over with a blank slate or whatever. So that feeling—I really needed that to happen.

And then as time moved on, I've gotten really involved, especially in MSA and activism, specifically.

Vanderscoff: So you had an experience of deepening or affirming your faith when you're here at UCSC. So, you have that. You get involved with the MSA. And then, can you talk about some of the particular work that the MSA's doing, particularly at this political moment.

Wildman: So we're always about bringing people together. That's a really powerful thing, spiritually and just socially and culturally, everything. So, there are a lot of social events we have always to invite people in, all the time. It's never only for Muslim folks. A lot of people, 70 percent or something of Americans have never met someone who's Muslim. So people need to meet Muslims so they break those stereotypes, basically. Just like any other stereotype.

So, we do a lot of social events. We're involved with the local masjid, and sometimes we'll go there. We have, so you know how people go to church every Sunday? I don't know how much anyone knows about Islam. So, there's Jumu'ah every Friday, which is like Friday prayers, similar to how Christian people pray on Sundays. That's actually held on campus in one of the Bay Tree conference rooms, which is just next to the Bay Tree Bookstore in Quarry Plaza. So that's really great. We actually, though, have recently been working to get a prayer space on campus. That's actually something we've been working on for a while. Last year we were working on it, too. My friend at UC Davis was like, "What? You don't have a prayer space? There's a prayer space on campus for us." And Davis definitely has a really big, I would say, Muslim Student Association, but also presence of Muslims and Arabs in general. So, they have a mosque right next to campus and they have a prayer space or whatever. I'm like, "Really? That's normal?" I was just talking to her recently. And so, recently those kind of things that we're asking for have been more listened to and responded to. Like okay, interfaith space. So now student government Officer of Diversity and Inclusion Hector has been working on getting that interfaith space. It's not just going to be for Muslims; it's going to be for everyone. That's super chill. We just need a space because praying five times a day, especially if you live off campus—not everyone prays five times a day, but to have that space is really important for those who do. Especially because, in general, it's really hard to practice in a society that's so

dominated by either—well I guess on campus honestly there's not a lot of religious presence. But the religious presence that there is, it's kind of the majority religion of the US, Christianity, which is already sometimes embedded into our culture. And so, I guess it's finding those little things.

Like for instance the dining halls. They've been serving a lot more halal food and I don't know if that's just recently, or if we've been asking for that, but that's pretty cool. And last year they did a little, but this year they're doing it more.

Last year, during Ramadan, because it was during finals week and around that time, sort of the end of the quarter—so you fast during the day, sunrise to sunset. And so, the dining halls close at certain times and they don't open until certain times. So, we were trying to get boxes to take out the food. And sometimes it was a lot of discussing and trying to explain this is a religious holiday. Then there'd be a line of people behind you and you'd be like okay, I feel so bad, I'm just going to grab a snack and sneak it out and leave, for the morning, for Suhoor.

Vanderscoff: Because you can't take food out of the dining hall.

Wildman: Yeah. You can take like one piece or something. So that's why we were trying to get boxes to be able to eat early in the morning for Suhoor, for the food that you eat before you fast during the day. And especially during finals week, you want to make sure you have that energy. But it's just those little things that a lot of people don't really think about, necessarily.

This year, we're working on talking to the dining hall and all that staff about Ramadan, especially because it's going to be this quarter, a good amount of the quarter during. So that's hopefully going to be a good thing. And then the interfaith space that we're getting is really exciting. We've had temporary prayer spaces. We have one at Science Hill in one of the classrooms right now. So, there have been accommodations made, for sure.

MSA in general usually hasn't considered itself at all political, until recently. It's been very much considered a spiritual organization, a religious organization.

Vanderscoff: And a broad one at that, I suppose, because it's pan-Muslim. So, you're talking about accommodating many different approaches to Islam as well, I suppose?

Wildman: Yeah. There are definitely different ways that people practice within MSA, but there is a lot of similarity. Because I think when you're Muslim-American, you figure out these intersections of culture and religion. I'm not saying that everyone practices the same way, definitely not, or the same things. But anyway, so on campus, I guess, finding those kind of spaces, but also social gatherings, that kind of thing, is really great.

And we've also gone to conferences. So, I went to MSA West this year, which was an amazing, amazing experience. And it blew my mind. And I got to meet Linda Sarsour, who's amazing. So, I'm really happy that MSA is a SOAR [Student Organization Advising & Resources] organization, so we're able to get the funding and the help needed to be able to drive down. And some of our members of MSA raised so much money, and it was awesome. We were able to stay in a hotel and eat food. It was super cool. So, and we got to meet activists and listen to Muslim scholars. And it was a really strong, happy feeling. That was this January, the beginning of this winter quarter. I think that was really important, especially during this time, to feel the strength of everyone together and know that we all support each other and there's a lot of love here. Yeah, feel that real strong sense of community, and then also feel really inspired and motivated. So, I think a lot of us after MSA West felt like, we need to do activism. Basically, Islam tells you that social justice is one of the most important parts of Islam. Activism is basically where you're told to go in this religion. In a sense, it's all about standing up against what's wrong, and doing what's right. And that's really easy to interpret, what's wrong, what's right. But in terms of what is just, what is fair, and coming from a place of love and stuff like that.

So, there were a lot of activists who were there at that conference, who people are looking up to. For me, it's definitely Linda Sarsour. I got to meet with her and talk with her. And for me, that was so awesome. She cofounded the Women's March. She's amazing. She made Muslim holidays part of the school calendar in New York public schools. She's done a lot of really important stuff.

So anyway, so I think that motivated MSA, or some members of MSA, to be more political. Some people definitely are not comfortable with being super political. You can't always expect everyone to be political, but it's true that when you're being politicized, a common response is that you have to get political. I'm using the term "get political" in a weird sense, because we're all kind of political and part of politics. But I think MSA has been much more political. This year, I worked with MSA to do the first protest against the first Muslim ban this last quarter, winter quarter. That was really great. There was a huge turnout and it was very supportive. It was a really, really strong feeling and it felt awesome. And it was really great to see the UC Santa Cruz community feel so connected to each other—who came out to that protest, and so strong just in your voices and in your people power. Because I think a lot of times it gets really, like if you're just watching the news, or reading the news or doing whatever, it gets really like, oh, I'm helpless, I can't do anything about it. But when you realize and you see that you can all come together to create those kind of spaces and really have your voices heard, like when you chant and go around campus and rally each other up, and have the signs that you're able to say what you want to say, you are heard in a way. And the media came out to that, although they kind of twisted a little bit of what we were doing. But that was good.

Vanderscoff: You mean media, in terms of your local response here in Santa Cruz? Or do you mean larger?

Wildman: We called some media people to come. But their whole thing was, it was the same week that we protested as the Berkeley protest against Milo. There was some violence there,

right?[33] There was some violence [to begin with], too. Anyway, and so their whole thing was like, "Oh, how do you feel about the Berkeley protest? Is this in response to the Berkeley protest?" I was like, "Oh, this is our own thing. It's different. It's part of a bigger thing, but it's different." And they were like "Oh, we called the College Republicans to see how they feel." So, a lot of media really tries to create these—so I was able to see that, which was interesting.

But anyway, the protest was great. It really helped me realize the ability we have as students on campus to be able to organize. It's awesome. And it's true that this university does its best to prevent that from happening, in the way that it has the decentralized college system. It's built with no large gathering place. Quarry Plaza isn't big enough or very central. But I know the amphitheater's going to be built soon. That's a large space. I don't know if that's going to be a future protesting space. I don't know what's going to happen. I mean, there's also more construction going into the forest, probably, unfortunately, to make more colleges in the future. So, what's central to campus will constantly be changing, I'm thinking.

Vanderscoff: Where do you rally now? Or where did you rally for that particular protest?

Wildman: Quarry Plaza. And then we marched around campus. Some other events, we've started at Oakes, that I've been part of. And then we've kind of looped around campus and gone downtown or whatever. Yeah, it depends. But definitely Quarry Plaza, but then it's definitely centered on one side of campus.

Vanderscoff: Well, that's great. So, we've gone an hour and 35 minutes. I don't want to hold you too long. So, keeping in mind, maybe another twenty minutes.

Wildman: Yeah, whatever works.

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[33] Milo Yiannopoulos is a political commentator associated with the political right wing including Breitbart News. In February 2017, Yiannopoulos was invited to speak at UC Berkeley by the Berkeley College Republicans. Peaceful protests against his appearance erupted in violence after anarchist protestors from off campus arrived.

Vanderscoff: So unless there's anything else you'd like to say about MSA, I'd like to talk about some of your other organizations, unless you think there's something that you'd like to express about what that means to you, or what you'd like to do through that organization.

Wildman: Yeah, I think MSA means to me a lot of important things, just like a really strong place of love on campus. The nicest people ever. And it's really genuine, too. And a wide array of people in terms of interests, so a lot of different majors, a lot of different, some people who are totally like, "Oh, yes, activism." And some people who are like, "Not my thing, but that's cool that you do that." So that environment, to have that ability to come together on campus is really, really great and powerful, especially in a time like this when you see people who are part of your community being pushed around or violated or demonized, to be able to be like hey, this is really good. We're really good. This is okay. To kind of have that affirmation. And then, also feel really safe with each other. I think a lot of us, especially a lot of Hijabis who I know are worried about walking around on campus. So just kind of being there for each other. Like oh, I'll walk with you, just hit me up. Those kind of things, just basic things. There's just more fear in general.

Activism

And fear can turn into a lot of different things. Some people it's doing nothing. For some people it's like, I have to do something. That's me right now. I have to do something. And this is true in a lot of different communities. Undocumented students on campus; MECHA; ABSA is definitely—and that's why I'm actually part of an organizing committee, we're having a meeting tonight. It's called the UCSC March Collective. And we're just starting out brand new and it's really exciting. But it's really great because we're an organization that brings people from multiple organizations who are activists. A more unified group of folks. It's a collective. Which is really great, because oftentimes there are all these orgs trying to do their own thing on campus because they're part of separate groups. But especially in a time like right now, we

really do need to come together, especially to make bigger change, and on a structural level, not just the little things. So, I think that this collective has a lot of future impact. And we've specifically been created to focus on visibilizing people of color. Because a lot of times, student activists on campus, it gets very focused. And we noticed, after the inauguration, after the election, it was a majority of white students and it was dominated by white people with megaphones, white men with a megaphone, cis white men, hetero. So anyway, it's a lot of things that we're trying to say. We're using a really intersectional approach, where students come from a lot of different backgrounds. So, it's really great. There's a lot of graduate students, too. How often does that happen? Usually undergrad and grad students on this campus are pretty separate, kind of doing their own thing. But I think it's a really powerful organization that has a lot of future implications.

And we've recently made it into the news in a kind of strange way, through the *Sentinel.* It's a bad news source. And that news source went directly onto Breitbart. They didn't even need to change it. It was talking about the Women's March on March 8th. The UCSC March Collective, we organized something on campus and then we went downtown to join with some of the other folks downtown. But there's some issues in terms of older white women holding signs that say, "All Lives Matter." And just thinking about—it's not just a generational difference. It's white feminism. And looking at the ways that we need to switch these dialogues. So, we needed to create our own space when we went downtown, that was separate, because our voices weren't really being heard. And we were being pushed aside with the main part of the march that had already started downtown.

So, we came along and so we formed our own circle because we were being pushed away. But within that circle, we had cars driving into us and a lot of interesting experiences. But also, there was this feeling of separation—like we can't work with you if you're not listening to us. And it's hard to have that unity, especially on and off campus. I think that divide with what's going on, on campus and off campus is really strong. I think it's something we're going to constantly

bump into. But I think that we're working on that more, especially recently with the General Assembly and some other groups that are downtown. We're becoming much closer with them. Whereas, I would say, with the Democratic Party people and Indivisible—their politics are just not very similar to ours. So, it's really important that we educate as well because we are students learning these things, but we're also individuals who've had experiences. We can educate with those experiences for people who haven't had those experiences. So, it's trying to figure out: where can we meet, along what lines? But also like how much inviting do we need to do in certain situations? Just because we want to make sure that we stay true to our goal as the UCSC March Collective. If that makes sense.

Vanderscoff: It does. And so, you're saying the *Sentinel* did a piece on this, on what, clashes within the rally and that got scaled up to Breitbart?

Wildman: Yeah, yeah, it was pretty gross. Pretty gross. The *Sentinel* wrote the first—oh, Ryan Masters, anyway, so he first wrote this first piece.[34] And then a lot of people, like my friend got in a Twitter fight with him which is unrelated—well it is related, but a lot of people were saying, what are you doing? You totally are not representing what happened. He said, "Self-proclaimed Brown Squad." We never called ourselves the Brown Squad. (laughs) Just some kind of strange things. Like there were cars driving into us. And he was saying, "This car nudged the protestors and they pushed back," and all this stuff. And it was like, the car was trying to drive into us. We were standing there to try to hold the space in the street that we had.

Vanderscoff: You were downtown somewhere?

Wildman: Yeah. Where were we, on Mission and Pacific? It was International Women's Day. There's been a call to action worldwide and there are people driving their cars into us. And we had people set up further up the block to block the street. But there would be cars that would

[34] http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/article/NE/20170308/NEWS/170309780

just zoom by. And they would just drive into us. And we would just stand there and be like, "Turn around!" And sometimes we'd dance or sing or shout. Or sometimes we'd just stand there.

But the smallest incidences of response, which were due to us being aggressed, was like one person threw some mud or something on the side of this truck of this guy who kept on driving into us and then was recording us. And then someone, I don't know if he wrote on the car, or tried to open his door and close it. I don't know. People were upset. But the majority of us were just standing there, trying to make sure the car didn't run us over. There were at least three cars that tried to do that.

And then earlier in the protest, we had also one of the organizers, actually, in the march collective—his bike got completely crunched by this woman's car who told us, "Fuck your black feminism." She was driving—this is just at the base of campus. She was making a right turn and we had held the space to be able to cross. And then, we had people on bikes to try to hold the space, because bikes can kind of be a good blockade. So, he was using his bike to make sure she didn't drive into us. And she drove forward and she got really upset. And then she crunched—her car basically pulled his whole bike underneath and crunched it, and his head kind of got hit. Then everyone got upset. But then we were like, okay, no, we have got to go. We can't just have some big mob scene here. We have to go downtown. And we have more important things. But we were also upset and sad. Why would this happen to one of our organizing members and his bike? He bikes everywhere. Some people, their bike is their main form of transportation. And someone who's trying to prevent a car from driving into us. That was really an emotional thing.

So, we moved on. But then later, what he told us and was messaging us, he was like, some UCPD came over and they asked what was happening. And the driver was like, "Oh, he tried to put his bike under my car." And then two white women come up and they're like, "Oh, we saw it, too. He tried to put his bike under her car. He slid it under." And all this stuff. And none of

us remember there being—but we had left. So, there's him being the only person representing his story of, I was holding up the bike and the car crunched the bike underneath. And the cops were like, "Well, you better be telling us the truth because it's three to one." But anyway, he figured out, it's not worth my time to try to work with them, even though she crunched my bike. I'm just going to get this done on my own. But it was just a really bad situation where you can't even trust the UCPD to protect student activists. I mean, not that that was an expectation, but it really clarified that.

And then we sent some people back who had video footage of it to show. It was a very heated day with a lot of aggression from the Santa Cruz community, which is something that would probably stand out to a lot of folks who are like, "Santa Cruz is so liberal." I mean, there are Trump supporters, definitely, in Santa Cruz. We see them and they yell at us. But there are also people who are like, "Oh, no, I'm liberal, but I don't agree with what you're doing." Or, "I don't think it's as important to protest." Or, "Why would you block the street? What's that going to do?" So, it's mostly those moderates, or the liberal or center left folks who we really have been running into those issues with.

The Town of Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: Yeah, and I'm curious just in general, I guess, about your experience of the town as well, as an activist, but then also just as a student.

Wildman: Downtown Santa Cruz is really white-dominated. And it's kind of strange because you have all this Silicon Valley and hipster stuff going on. Then you also have the hippie culture—there's some of that left. And some of that's a little problematic in certain ways. But you also have a huge population of Latinx, undocumented and basically low socioeconomic status income folks. So, there's a huge array of the demographics of Santa Cruz. And then Santa Cruz also includes Watsonville, which a lot of people are not in touch with, or don't even know. Recently the farmers have been having basically a major struggle with food produce, and

there's basically been a lot of farmers starving. But students are just here on campus doing their campus stuff. So, a lot of people aren't aware of what's going on off campus unless they have family there, or they live there, or they work there, or they're involved in off-campus things.

But definitely there's a huge housing crisis in Santa Cruz. It's just worse and worse and worse every year, with students and with houseless people on the streets. The amount of money you have to pay to be able to have a small place is just crazy.

And Steve McKay, actually, that soc professor I was talking about, he's doing a huge project that's really important, finding out more about the housing crisis and figuring out ways and talking to the community members. It's really community-based, participatory action research. So, it's really a great thing. So, there are people doing good things to try to work together, or just ask, "What do you need from us on campus?" Because there are a lot of resources on campus.

I think the relationship is really interesting. UC brings in a lot of the money to the downtown, whether it's the bus system that they had to recently cut back on. But students, through our student fees we pay for transportation, do the bus system, a large part of it is students. But it's also workers. And the UC is the largest employer in the state of California. So, the workers on campus are really important to the Santa Cruz community, but a lot of students just don't notice that, or don't pay attention to that. I mean, I'm talking from the dining hall workers to the custodial staff, especially with the custodial staff and the CSOs and people, more and more people have been asked to leave, so there have been less workers present, but doing the same amount of jobs, but even more, because there are more students. And not being paid well and not having good working conditions.

One of the custodial staff I'm really close to, Ramon, he struggles from back issues from all the work that he does every day. And there are older folks doing this, too. And I try to ask about workers' compensation, you know? There's hopeful me, right? Because I learned in my class on

workers' rights; they fought for workers' compensation. You've got to use that. That's important. But for some people, that's not even something that their bosses would let them have, or could think that they could afford. Or they would ask them to leave at that point and just hire someone else. And just the toll that it takes on workers' health on this campus. I'm also kind of close to some of the CSOs [who are having] insomnia, because the CSOs have to stay up all night, basically, walking around campus and just talking to them about health issues. They're like, "Workers' compensation? Ha, ha, ha." That's a joke, right?

Right now, I'm really focused on workers, especially with May Day coming up. So, we have a huge action planned for May first. That's really exciting because we're trying to shutdown campus. And hopefully we do. We're going to be picketing at both entrances. That's specifically going to be focused on undocumented workers. There are a lot of undocumented people in Santa Cruz. A lot, I think there's around a thousand. I don't know. Really high numbers of people who filed taxes using the TIN number, which is like if you're trying to get documentation in the US and you believe that you can, basically, you would file taxes under that TIN number. And so, so many people did. And just thinking about that and the way that deportations have already started in Santa Cruz can affect our community and individuals and families and people, is really, really, really large. It would really affect Santa Cruz a lot. There are a lot of groups like YARR**.** There are a lot of rapid response kind of groups coming up of ways that people can all be in touch. When you see ICE people, report it. All that kind of basic stuff. But it's really real and it's really scary. We are living in that time right now.

The raids that recently happened in the Beach Flats community—it was under this idea of there being gang members or whatever. But there were deportations that happened. They came in with armored cars and the little grenade thing. It was really a military, like Homeland Security was there.

Just kind of like the trust, also, of the Santa Cruz PD—just thinking about what ways we can help each other during this time, specifically students, because there are so many of us here and we can really be of help to local Santa Cruz people.

Vanderscoff: That's great. I'm going to put this on pause for one second.

Wildman: Yeah. [pause]

Vanderscoff: Okay. So, picking up and moving towards a conclusion. I have this section of closing the circle. You presented a very balanced view of UCSC and Crown and these various facets of this institution in the way in which it's supported your personal growth, and the ways in which that's been difficult; the ways in which this has been a place for your own political development and action and advocacy; and then also ways in which you've seen resistance and backlash to that. So, I'm curious, then, as to your thoughts about your personal growth and change, academically, politically, however, and what UCSC has done for you as a place to think at, and to think from. This can be a comment; this can be a critique—pulling these threads together. '

Wildman: I think UCSC has really changed my life and my perspective on everything. My freshman year was a time of complete growth. After being in such an awful place—whenever you're able to get out of a really bad place, you learn a lot and you gain a lot of strength and personal development. I mean, in high school, I felt like I knew who I was and I was kind of like oh, I want to have these deep conversations. But a lot of people weren't quite ready to have them. Being in college, in a college space, you can have those deep conversations and you can stay up all night in a dorm room, talking about all this stuff. Just not in lounges, because we don't have lounges anymore. But you can have those conversations with people.

Vanderscoff: Speaking of housing things, not having lounges.

Wildman: Yeah, not having lounges, I mean, as an RA, that's really difficult. A big part of building community is having a social space within a building where students can spend time together, they can study together. It's pretty crazy. And the fact is that there are doubles; there are triples. And then what they're doing with the lounges is they're able to get more money out of them, because they're calling them large triples. But then, for instance, in my building, not even all the rooms are full. So, they took away a lounge space so that they could get as much money by having the most number of people in large triples. Anyway, it's really unfortunate. What was I saying?

Oh, yeah. So, having those really deep conversations and learning a lot about other people, and that's really helped me learn about myself. Because I learn about, I learn a lot about my upbringing and how it's shaped who I am, because I'm so different from so many people here, and they're so different from me. And to figure out why are we so different, and to have these conversations, it's really interesting. And that sounds really basic. But you get into really deep places. And so, I think that, on top of that, yeah, having those really emotional conversations, I think, are really important. Especially in a time like this. So, I built a lot more deeper connections this year in particular.

And that's been really important to me and my personal growth because I think that I feel closer, actually, to a lot of the people I've met in college than I do now from like my high school friends. Definitely from my high school friends. Some of my elementary school friends. Some of my elementary school friends I'm still like, one of them actually is transferring here, so I'm really excited. So, it's interesting how that is. Sometimes I feel like I wasn't quite myself in high school. In middle school, I was. And middle school is weird, for a lot of people it's a difficult time in terms of self-consciousness and social drama. But anyway, but then in college I've really found myself again in the sense that I've learned a lot of self-agency. I've built a lot of confidence in my skills that are outside of academia, which I was not expecting. I thought college was going to be a lot about studying and learning things. You know, learning things in

the sense of like oh, I learned this in school today. But college is like constant school today. Especially because I'm living on campus and I'm an RA. I'm always learning new things and watching people, and interesting social interactions.

I think I've learned a lot about myself in terms of how I deal with issues that I have. Like personally, but also societal issues. Sometimes it causes a lot of anger and frustration. Sometimes it causes confusion. Sometimes it's really sadness. But figuring out how to change those emotions into something that's active and gives you power. And understanding your own power and in what ways you can use power in a positive sense because it's shaped by your values. Like the ability to act. And so, I think that kind of coming to realize that has really been great for me. And I think that now what I need to do, though, start doing, is really focus in on some of the issues or the things that I'm more passionate about. I've spread myself all over campus, because I'm so interested in so many different parts of campus, but focusing in would probably be good, in a sense, while keeping those connections, so, I can try to find a specific area I want to work in through activism.

In college in general, I've done a lot of questioning. Why am I here? Why am I studying this stuff? Why am I not out there doing the actions, the activism I want to be doing? Because balancing a life of being a student and an activist is really tricky. Will I do my readings tonight, or am I going to send out all those emails and get the places and reach out to those people and have those meetings with those people? I feel like at this time and right now, why would I be sitting down doing all my readings?

And it's true we need to do readings, because we need to understand what's going on. We need to have better ways of looking at things and theorizing, and we need to learn from wonderful people who have written about these things, yes. I totally feel that. But at some point, we can't all just be sitting here. What good is that knowledge if you're not putting it to practice? And it's

that balance of trying to still gain that academic knowledge but also, you know, do all the activism that you want to do.

So, I guess balance of life, and learning that in college, has been really important. But also learning about more of my passions, and understanding why I'm doing what I'm doing, and what makes me do what I'm doing, and really looking into my family and my background. But also separating myself from that in a sense of oh, I really am who I am. There are all the things that make who you are, and then there's the person that you create as who you are. So, I've done a lot of that creating who I am as a person in college. So, I feel very different from the person who I was when I started, which is super cliché, but it's super true, too. if I were to meet me, freshman year me, I'd be like, oh, I don't know, hey, what's up, this is kind of weird, I don't really think I could connect to you very well.

Vanderscoff: You wouldn't hang.

Wildman: I don't really have the same passions as you. And that's weird, because that's yourself. I don't know—hypothetically.

Vanderscoff: So one question in closing is just, when you reflect on what's most important for you out of all of that, what comes next for you at UCSC and then looking beyond that, if that's something you're doing?

Wildman: Yeah. (laughs) So probably what my family would like best for me is graduate school. Probably what the activist that I've recently been working with, or the trainings that I've been doing would think would be best for me, is not doing that and doing a lot of organizing. I'm still figuring out where I fall. Graduate school, you can learn a lot from. But I don't just want to fall into that dominant narrative of following that drive, the capitalism, to get that good job. Why would I actually be getting that degree? So, I like thinking about it. I'm not going to go straight into it, I don't think, after I get my undergraduate degree, hopefully, here. So, I guess I

would still be thinking about graduate school probably sometime in the future, maybe, But I think that activism and doing organizing would be really important, in whatever sense that comes through.

I have been really interested in education specifically, but I don't know if I want to be a teacher or professor. My high school teacher, Mr. Prophet, really shaped who I am today. He's a US history teacher. He's amazing. And I was kind of like, "I love teaching. I want to be like you. You're amazing; you made my life so awesome." He was really there for me for a lot of things. But also, I learned a lot from him. He taught away from the textbook, like different things outside of it. He would bring up Stonewall and stuff that wasn't even in the textbook. And he would tell me like, "Oh, yeah, you can be a teacher, but I can see you being a professor, too." I think about that sometimes because my professors have changed my worldview and life. But I'm just trying to think—where can I do the most activism, the most change? I don't know yet. I'm still figuring that out. But there are a lot of opportunities out there and I'm really excited. I'm leading the life I want to lead and that's really important to me. I feel so grateful to have that privilege to be able to do that.

I've been really lucky because I've been blessed with a lot of leadership skills, in certain senses, that I didn't realize that I had. I think everyone has them. But I've been able to really work on them and improve them—everything from public speaking to building connections with people. The jobs that I have on campus give me a lot of access to resources. And that's been great. Even if I'm printing flyers and killing the printer and I shouldn't be, like for my RA job, it's important, because it's for organizing. And that's the point where I make the decision about what's the most important to me. Just like how I use the programs office to do poster making. I mean, that's really great that we have all those resources and that you're able to feel what you think students need the most at certain times.

I also want to stay tied to this university because I feel very close to it. I could be in that job at Crown College, the programs coordinator. I could be in that job at housing, ACAO, CAO. I'm kind of thinking that would be great. I know so much about the university and the way things work. But I probably want to reach out a little further and get out. (laughs) I mean, maybe I will eventually come back.

Vanderscoff: Perfect. Well, great. On my end, I'd like to thank you so much for your time, and for all the work you're doing. I'm very grateful that you'd come and sit down.

Wildman: Thank you so much. Thanks for listening and doing this. I think it's so important to have a historical archive of anything, especially because—I'm always thinking what are people going to think when they look back on this time that we're in right now. What am I going to think? What is the next generation going to think about us? Wow, were we just laying around while the 45th was president? I don't know. Or is going to be like—I don't know. I don't know. That's really interesting to think about. But especially at Santa Cruz, there's so many of these tensions and these complications. It's shrouded in this idea that UC Santa Cruz is a liberal little bubble. But it really isn't. (whispers) Maybe it is a liberal bubble, if you're talking about liberals, coming from someone like me, who's pretty radical. But I think that it's important for people to deconstruct that as students here, or as people looking at the university, because there are issues that are happening on campus. There are micro-aggressions every day. There is systematic oppression of people through the system that we're in here, the UC system. So just thinking about that is important. Anyway, sorry I went on another tangent. (laughs)

Vanderscoff: Okay, no, that's great. Thank you.

Wildman: Thank you.

A Coda

Vanderscoff: Okay, so it's Tuesday, April 18, 2017. And we're doing essentially a coda, a follow-up, with Sabina from last week. So, there are just a few areas that we didn't talk about in depth or at all, really, that we wanted to fill in. So hence we're meeting again. We talked a lot about your involvement with Crown, and with programming at Crown, and also with the Muslim Student Association. But one thing we didn't quite get to is another campus-wide involvement that you have, which is through the SUA. So just to start us off, I'm wondering if you wouldn't mind just saying a little bit about how you started to be involved with the SUA and walk us into that story.

Wildman: Yeah, sure. So, I started being involved in the SUA through Crown. Each college has their own senate representatives to SUA. I'm not involved in SUA's other focus, for sure. But on Crown Student Senate, I got very involved my freshman year. I was in multiple positions, or committees and that sort of thing. And I worked really hard with the Crown Provost, Manel [Camps], to help get the Crown library renovated and all these sorts of projects. I also was on the SUA Elections Commission last year. So, I helped oversee the elections in enforcing, basically, the rules of the elections, helping with all that sort of stuff, and helping get out the vote.

And also last year, I found out things about SUA through Students for Justice in Palestine, SJP, because last year SJP was able to pass a resolution that was calling for divestment, asking UC Santa Cruz to divest from multiple companies that invest in Israel.[35] And that was a very heated debate in SUA last here, where there were students coming from J Street, and JSU, and Hillel and saying, "Oh, this will be discrimination against Jewish students." So, there was this kind of misinformation that anti-Zionism was the same as anti-Semitism. That was one of the longest SUA meetings—I want to say it went till very early in the morning, basically. It went for a

[35] See https://sua.ucsc.edu/assembly/agendas-and-minutes/2013-2014/files/UCSC%20Divest.pdf

while, and they had all these different people speaking. And people are very heated about these conversations, so it was very controversial.

And then this year, I'm on the Student Fee Advisory Committee. We basically listen to different funding proposals and allocate student fees to those different events or units. And we also have a say on if we support referenda. There's a big athletics one coming through this year. It's possible athletics might be completely cut out of the university if it doesn't pass. There's an undocumented student fee measure as well. So, there are a lot of really important ones. So that's what's going on.

Vanderscoff: I'm curious, then, what the conversation has been around those two particular measures and then what your own voice has been on those two issues.

Wildman: The athletics referenda. Athletics on this campus is one of those confusing subjects. I don't know, people definitely have different ideas about it. Some people really believe that Santa Cruz was never really meant to be an athletic school, part of that being the slug mascot; part of that being just students not wanting it to be one of those schools with a big football team and all that. People think athletics might not even fit Santa Cruz. And other people rely on athletics for their everyday health. That is something they're really passionate about. A lot of students are involved in different athletics teams. It's true that we aren't D1 or anything, so it's not like it's bringing in that kind of high level of school spirit, or the money that you get from those big games. But it's definitely, I would say, it's an important part for a lot of people's lives on campus. But it's also not an important part for a lot of people's lives on this campus, and that's what makes it confusing.

I think that athletics are really important. 'Part of that is because I was a student athlete in high school, so I kind of know what it's like. But I think that it would be a shame if we did cut it out.

But part of what's really tricky is that the university doesn't fund these things. The fact is, student fees have to go towards these really important parts of our university— Everything from OPERS, the Office of Physical Education, Recreation and Sports—to all the other things on campus that we really need, like transportation, right? Like buses and TAPS. All those things are funded by student fees, which is crazy. So, students really don't want to have to pay more because we're already paying so much. So, it's really hard for these fees to pass a lot of the time. It would be different if it wasn't coming out of our budget. If it was like, oh, the university wants to fund this—what do you think? People would all be like, yes, of course. But it's different when they think, oh, I have to pay my money towards this.

The undocumented students fee—it's an emergency fund right now because of the situation we're in. There are a lot of undocumented students on this campus. It's pretty scary right now and people are unsure if they're going to be able to even attend. They're unsure of their safety because there have been ICE raids on campus, like last year. And in downtown Santa Cruz this year. So that fund, I think, is really important. I definitely support that. And SFAC also supports that.

And there are some other ones having to do with SUA, whether or not to pay people more. That kind of thing. And we have a food pantry as well, funding for that.

But one of the biggest things going on in SUA, especially right now because it's springtime, so the elections are happening, is this debate around if SUA should be a space for student activists and if it should be involved in that kind of organizing or not. And recently, Jay Semana, a member of Merrill student government, has made a resignation letter of sorts to the parliamentarian of SUA, Jane Loughboro, saying that he was going to resign due to people not doing their jobs and also not creating a space for student activism. I think a lot of people support that who have been involved in SUA, who feel that SUA has become a toxic space where very few people speak and it really hasn't been doing the things that a lot of students

want it to be doing, in terms of representing student voices, especially minority students, and doing that kind of outreach that's necessary.

Especially with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Hector [Navarro], who's the officer for that this year, has not done what a lot of people would like him to be doing, and instead has been focusing on the athletics bill and promoting athletics on campus. So, there're some issues in terms of what students feel the needs are and what SUA representatives feel like students' needs are.

Right now, though, we're about to go into a big election where the people who are kind of more establishment, if we're going to say it that way, SUA people who have been in SUA for a while, who kind of just want to keep things going, just make sure it's all good kind of things like that. But then there are also new folks, or actually folks who have been involved in student government, but new in the sense that they're coming back to SUA with new ideas, who are very passionate for social change, for supporting students. And especially a lot of these folks running are people of color and minority groups and people who really want to bring back some form, maybe of ESOC—there used to be representatives from different ethnic orgs on a big committee that really was a big force in SUA. And so, some people are trying to bring back some form of that, which would also include the Cantu Queer Center, which would include all these kind of intersectional groups as well. The students who are more activist-oriented, who are running, are also thinking of ways that they can support student action on campus. So that's a big thing that's going to happen this election, whether or not people are going to vote for those people who have been doing kind of the same old stuff at SUA, or if they want more, more radical kind of student activists involved in SUA. So that's a big thing coming up.

Vanderscoff: So if the SUA has been called "toxic," would you mind sharing the ways in which you've perceived that to be true or not true?

Wildman: Yeah. I don't want to speak too much on this just because I'm not an SUA rep, technically. But I do have a lot of friends who are involved in SUA spaces. A lot of people feel their voices aren't heard. There's a lot of social drama, cliques, people just sending mean things to each other, a lot of talking behind people's back. It's a very small group of people and a lot of them know each other really closely, certain groups of people within SUA. So, it's really not a good student government space. It's not really in touch with their constituents. I mean, that's how I feel. Other people would argue differently. But a lot of times people get caught up in all these little social things. They aren't really thinking about who they're representing and what students need and want.

But it's true that they do do a lot of good work, like Tamra Owens has helped create this food pantry on campus. There's a lot of good stuff happening. But it's true that the space [SUA] is known to be kind of a negative space. People don't look forward to going there. People generally don't feel very comfortable speaking up, especially when there's certain people who usually take up the space a lot more. People find it hard to go against the mainstream in SUA. So, if someone has a different opinion, it can be difficult in terms of, yeah, just how everyone is.

Vanderscoff: And so, based on your own experience of being here, what would an SUA that's more responsive to its constituency look like or be doing?

Wildman: Right. I think that an SUA that's more responsive to its constituency would be more involved with students and asking what students need. Right now, I would say the majority of students who are not involved in student government don't know what SUA is. If you tell someone, "Oh, it's SUA elections." They're like, "SUA? What's that?" So, I think just transparency. But having an online website with the minutes is not enough. Having a date when meetings are and like whenever it's open forum people can attend is not enough. So specifically doing more outreach in the colleges. I don't know if that's online polls, people tend to do those. Or if it's like in real life, in meetings. And it's true that a lot of these folks have

office hours. But getting outside of the student government spaces and bringing people into student government who are just the same student government people.

And I think also specifically reaching out to different students on campus who are minorities, or historically disadvantaged, or facing issues with the UC admin, or California government, or US government. So just thinking about those groups, because their voices are oftentimes not supported. Right now ABSA, African Black Student Alliance, is putting through some demands through SUA and basically just asking for support so they can demand that of the chancellor. But SUA can be that kind of space that really supports student voices. But I think SUA will need to do more than just waiting for students to come to them. I think they need to reach out and ask students: what are your needs? What do you want us to work on?

Vanderscoff: And as a way of thinking, what sort of issues are coming to the fore, would you mind saying a little more about the debate over BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions] and then any other sort of key lightning-rod issues that might come to mind. But starting with that.

Wildman: Yeah, BDS is definitely very controversial on campus. There's kind of a history of the Santa Cruz admin not supporting BDS and referring it to it as discrimination against Jewish students. For instance, last year when that resolution was passed, Chancellor Blumenthal sent out one of those school-wide messages saying that he was worried about discrimination against Jewish students increasing on campus. He likened it, in the email, to what black students deal with on college campuses across the US. Because at the time, there was Mississippi University and all these difficult big, violent cases of folks discriminating against black students. And that definitely happens on this campus, but saying that the discrimination against Jewish students is anywhere close to that, I think, is a wide stretch. And then also saying that the resolution itself would discriminate against Jewish students, I'm very sure that that's not the case. But I know a lot of people feel that way who have grown up in these cultures or families that are very Zionist. So, it's hard for people to separate that out from their Jewish identity.

But also, like on SJP, for instance, we have a lot of Jewish students, even Jewish students who grew up in those kind of households that were really supporting the state of Israel. But then after they learned about it, the issues, they were like, wait a minute. This isn't right. This is a genocide of people. This is colonialism. This is apartheid. So that was a really heated issue in SUA and a lot of people were upset, at least, a lot of people in my circles were upset about the chancellor's message following that, feeling it was clearly not supporting Palestinian rights, human rights, and just like what SJP had worked to do.

Vanderscoff: And then what's the conversation happening on that issue as the repercussions of that run all the way up to systemwide. I mean, I know that Tammi Benjamin sort of led a campaign that ultimately pushed the Regents to pass this resolution. And Judith Butler writes a letter and it becomes—

Wildman: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: But what happens here at Santa Cruz becomes a part of this larger conversation.

Wildman: Definitely, definitely. And movements of BDS from students all over the country, I mean, there's a National Student for Justice in Palestine convention or conference that a lot of my friends went to. I didn't get to go. But students are doing this everywhere right now, especially. So that's really exciting. Sorry, I kind of cut you off. Go ahead.

Vanderscoff: No, no. That was actually the question. Thinking about this as something that's clearly an area of conversation, dialogue, but then also really substantial disagreement and heat not only in UCSC, but systemwide. I'm just curious about what the conversation has been on that. And then, perhaps the most productive way for you to reflect on that is just to reflect on that through your involvement with SJP.

Wildman: Yeah, definitely. So, it's definitely true that there's all these different BDS movements happening on different campuses. I think college campuses are a really good space

for student activism in general, but also a place for people to learn more about the issues. We have professors on campus that are very Zionist, but we also have professors who talk about the injustices that Israel is doing to Palestinians. So, I think that's interesting for some people to be exposed, also, to issues that they didn't know about before. It's definitely part of the larger movement and I would say especially it's working hand-in-hand with other divestment things that are going on, I mean, in separate issues. But all issues are related. I mean, there's the Fossil-Free UC movement, where students are asking for divestment from fossil fuels. There's also the No DAPL, the Dakota Access Pipeline divestment. So, there's a lot of folks asking for divestment, to ask for human rights, for environmental justice, for social justice issues. So, I think it's part of these bigger things of the university investing our tuition money that we're spending so much on, like it's so expensive right now, on these different corporations that students don't support and that are hurting people around the world. I think maybe students are more aware, because tuition's so high, of where is their money going? And I don't want it to be going places that I don't want it to be going. And feeling we don't really have consent or choice in where the money goes. So, I think that's really important.

I'm thinking of SJP. And so, on campus, for instance, there are a lot of students who are very, very involved in the BDS movement, to the point where they're on this website called Canary Mission, that targets students who are working for BDS and Palestinian rights, referring them as related to Hamas, or terrorist organizations, but also just kind of blacklisting them. So, they have background—they have photos of these students, videos of these students, and a whole bunch of background information on the different things they've done. So, some students in our SJP are on that website, which is really worrisome because no one's been able to figure out how to take it down. So that's something interesting, that students are definitely being targeted on campus. Like their specific names and the things that they're standing up against.

Vanderscoff: This is a UCSC website? Or this is a larger—

Wildman: No. It's larger. Canary Mission. They have students all over the US who are fighting for justice for Palestinians. They really put a twist to it. It's a little freaky. But we definitely have a high level of activism, I would say. SJP is known as one of the most radical groups on campus. We had a lot of actions recently this year. Last quarter, winter quarter, we had a mock checkpoint, which definitely caused a lot of controversy on campus. It was a mock checkpoint, a mock Israeli checkpoint. So, we had people pretending to be IDF, Israeli Defense Force officers. I pretended to be one of them. And some of it was kind of visual for folks. We had fake guns. Just the word "gun" written on cardboard across us. And then everyone else was wearing black and standing in a line, linked arms, kind of making a wall in the Quarry Plaza area. We also did it at McHenry. But at Quarry Plaza, we also had signs around us and we were kind of just basically asking students for their student IDs before we let them pass. But had to allow for students to go around the outside, because otherwise we would get in trouble with the cops and with the university for blocking the movement of people. So, we made sure not to do that. But some students from Hillel, one person, called six other people to call the cops to say that we were—I forget what he said, I don't know, some kind of threat. So, then the cops came and they recorded us. They were standing there for a while when we were at Quarry Plaza.

And we had a couple of incidences of students purposefully running through the walls of our linked arms when we clearly had side areas that they could have walked around. He walked back and forth and was yelling at us. And then the cops actually escorted him through because he said he couldn't get through. So that was very bad. It was hard for a lot of us to see. We all asked, "Who do you serve?" And then we all said, "Shame!" I mean, this guy was a tall white guy in a frat. And then he came back again saying, "I'm not racist." And he brought a friend of his who was, or I don't know if he was a friend—it sucks to be this guy's friend—but he was like, "Oh, I'm actually not racist. Look at my brown friend." And he had his arm around him. So, there's definitely a lot of clear racism. I don't even know if he was offended by the checkpoint. I don't even know if he knew about Israel and Palestine. I think it was just

aggression, like stupid protestors blocking my way. And then him being racist. But the fact that the cops, the UCPD, walked him, escorted him through the middle of our linked arms, was pretty rough. I mean, it kind of shows you how student activist feel in general about campus police.

And a little bit later this week it's going to be 420, where they've increased the cop presence by a lot over the years and they call for UCPD from different universities to come. So, there's a high presence of cops that are going to be on campus in a couple of days, which a lot of students are concerned about. So that's just one of the tensions that's definitely happening on campus.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, maybe you can say a little bit more about what that relationship has been, at least in terms of the protests you participated in, with campus police and then city police, if that's relevant.

Wildman: Yeah, the SJP thing's definitely had the most amount of UCPD enforcement officials being involved. I also had a friend overhear the UCPD calling us assholes and stuff. It's true, we were blocking, we were making it difficult. But that's also part of protesting, right? You disrupt a space to make a point. So, the UCPD, in terms of issues relating to Palestine, definitely have a big role in that. It's clear that the administration is against SJP. I mean technically, that mock checkpoint—we did not affiliate it with SJP, because we knew we would have been kicked off as an org. So, we just said we were a whole bunch of students coming together to do this. But it was definitely mostly SJP students. But the point was, we actually had to have professors standing there and folks that were neutral bystanders so they could see if something unfair happens. Because in the past, there have been unfair accusations of people involved in Palestinian rights activism on campus. I'm not really sure about the details of that, but to the point where we needed to make sure there were people there with us.

And the same with when we were at McHenry. The cops didn't follow us when we moved over to the library but we definitely faced a lot of people yelling at us and a lot of people really upset.

And some, I think parents, or some older women who were involved in Hillel or J Street or something like that, or maybe it was JSU, were video recording us the whole time. And when we were at Quarry Plaza, it got pretty heated when the cops were there as well. Because there were students from Hillel and stuff with Israeli flags around their backs. ‘

So that was definitely a moment where a lot of us were honestly scared because that white guy actually came back again and pushed one of our members of the wall around. But he couldn’t really push back the white guy, because the cops were there and he’s black, and we all know what would have happened. So, it’s kind of taking all this aggression and not responding to it, which is kind of rough.

In general, I would say I haven’t had a lot of run-ins with campus police, except for one time, I think it must have been the J20 or something, people who organized that were mostly white faculty members on the west side of campus, at Kresge and Porter, I think, they organized that. It was called the People’s Inauguration. And I’m pretty sure the cops actually were there at the base of campus, either coming down or blocking off part of the road. So, they must have had a good relationship with cops. So, it depends, right, on who you’re organizing with—if you’re more militant, if you have more people of color in your group, you’re probably not going to, you know.

But I actually do have a story about campus police. Because on International Women’s Day, March 8th, we were marching off of campus. And I’m part of the march collective here. So, we had organized an on-campus rally. And then, we were going to go join the rest of the Santa Cruz community downtown. We were marching down the main street, and we were just at the base of campus, right where the police station is, the admissions office, the carriage house, all those places. We had just entered that intersection. We were trying to block it off so that the students, we could all walk through. But people were blocking it off with their bikes. And one of the organizers, Rodrigo, he was blocking off the cars with his bike. And this one woman kept

on trying to drive into him. And so, he put his bike in front of him. She drove through him, and she actually told us, "Fuck your black feminism." I'm assuming someone had commented first on her white feminism or something, because we were saying, "This is International Women's Day, don't run us over." But she was very aggressive. And she ran over, actually, and crunched his bike under her car. Because she turned into him multiple times, or one time just a little bit, and then kind of over again. And his bike was crunched under the car and broken. He got a little bumped up, but he was fine, thank goodness.

And then after that, students started to get angry and upset. You hurt this person; he's one of our organizers. We are just here in the streets marching downtown. But we decided to just like—the organizers were like no, let's just go. That's not important. Let's set downtown to join everyone else.

But Rodrigo stayed there. I don't know who called the cops, but the UCPD came, because it was basically at the base of campus, so it was still kind of campus. And then they came and two white women showed up who said that they had been watching, who were not part of the protest, who said, "Oh, yeah, we saw him slide his bike under the car on purpose."

And then the driver was like, "Oh, yeah, he put his bike under the car." And he was the only one there in that situation, because we had all left, which wasn't the smartest thing, and now we know. But basically, he was the only person saying, "Well, no, actually I was just holding my bike there to prevent the car from driving into all of us."

And then the cops were like, "Oh, well you better be right, because there are three stories that say otherwise." He felt his voice wasn't being heard. It's pretty scary when there are cops talking to you and he's a person of color. And he has three people telling another story. So, he figured it wasn't really worth his time to try to get money to be able to fix his bike. This woman could have honestly killed him because she drove over him, basically, and his bike.

We actually sent back someone who's part of our group because we were in text communication with him. And he was saying the cops are here and they don't believe me. So, then someone had video recorded it on their phone. So, then they brought it back and showed the cops. Anyway, that was just one big part of that march that was really hurtful to all of us to see that happen. And pretty surprising, too because usually people would just not drive over students.

Vanderscoff: So you mentioned this sense that with SJP, you get a very clear sense that this is not something that the administration supports.

Wildman: Right.

Vanderscoff: So you mentioned the chancellor's letter. And then I'm curious if there are other ways in which that seems to be manifested.

Wildman: Yeah. I feel a lot of Jewish students on campus have a lot of power with the administration. But historically it's not the same. First of all, the university invests in Israel. But they don't just invest in Israel; they're definitely clearly concerned with Jewish students and Jewish students being discriminated against on campus. It's true that there's discrimination against Jewish people—I'm not doubting that—but it's nothing to the extent of what black people, for instance, face on campus. I mean, I don't know. I haven't seen the statistics from hate bias incidents. But just the fact that they consistently are concerned about one group of students, but not others. I don't know enough about the history of SJP but I know in the past there have been instances where students who are protesting with SJP have been—I don't know if they've been threatened to leave or not. I don't want to say the wrong thing. But basically, also cops had definitely been called in. I think actually a SWAT team two, three years ago, when there was another mock checkpoint, I think the SWAT team or something, they said, was called? I think the reason was also because they were actually blocking traffic that time. And it might have been a little more violent, or militant, in the action. And there were a lot of people who got

really upset and heated. But I know they definitely called in the cops. I guess you could say that's normal for campus and for safety enforcement or whatever. But it's true that there's special attention, I would say, being paid to the BDS movement, because we're seen kind of as a threat on this campus, I would say. I'm pretty sure Chancellor Blumenthal is Jewish, but I don't know. I think his wife supports Israel. But he definitely does support Jewish students, for sure, on campus, though. There are also professors on campus that support Zionism—in the past they were able to call the professor, who then called, I don't know, the administration or something, who called the cops. So, they have a lot of inside connections, I would say, with faculty and admin on campus. It's not to say that there aren't professors who do support Palestinian rights. They do. There are some professors, for sure. But they have to be careful with their jobs as well, especially professors who are not tenured. So, it's part of the reason we can't get all the support we would like to get, because it's dangerous for professors to voice that they are in support of SJP.

Vanderscoff: And so then as a final question on this, I'm curious if there have been any points of dialogue on this between student orgs on opposite sides of the issues.

Wildman: Yeah, definitely. Hillel's reached out and asked to do dialogue with SJP before. In general, students from SJP are not interested in dialogue because what happens with dialogue is the hierarchies—colonialism and all those things, and the ways that structural oppression work continue in those conversations. So, without realizing it, a lot of the people making their arguments are using arguments that are based on colonial racist terms. And for a lot of people, it doesn't feel worth it to have to have those arguments. Because it's very clear going into it; it ends up being an argument. People say "dialogue" and it's very clear going into it, what students' ideas are before—so I think people use the term "dialogue" to be like, "Oh, yeah, we want to have nice relations with you." But it ends up, in the past it has been this way, and with individual students who know each other in different orgs, where it's just kind of like, oh, we'll

just sit down and argue. Because people aren't ready to change their perspectives because they already know how they feel about it. So that's not beneficial dialogue.

But I do believe that there can be dialogue that's educational, and can open people's points of view. I don't think it will necessarily be between students involved in organizations that very strongly believe certain ways. But I think on the individual, friendly kind of level, it can definitely happen. The only thing with the student orgs is that it's not really a lot of students' interests. People know how a lot of SJP folks feel, so they're not trying to find out more about that. So, it ends up not usually happening. And it's complicated, too, because a lot of groups will invite—like Hillel will invite the Armenian Student Association or different groups, and invite them for their Shabbat, or these different dinners. It seems really nice and it's hard for people to turn down. But there's also a lot of political moves happening in every single way that the organizations reach out to each other, or orgs reach out to other orgs who might not know about stuff.

But with SJP—I would say that, yeah, some SJP members know people in Hillel, or were friends with a lot of people in Hillel, especially the Jewish students who are in SJP. For instance, I have a lot of friends who are in Hillel. And that was hard for me during the mock checkpoint because one of my friends came out and was with the people with the Israel flag. So, there are definitely friendships across those political boundaries, but it gets tricky in terms of student orgs having dialogues together. But I do think on the individual level, it's definitely possible. I've had discussions, but it gets really emotional and I think it's easier to have those discussions with people who aren't sure how they feel. A lot of people are like, "Well, I don't really know, so I'm neutral," so those are the people to really have the conversations with, I would say.

Vanderscoff: So unless there's anything further you would like to say about that?

Wildman: I don't think so. I would say that SJP students are generally a really strong activist group, and the way that it's held and led is really great. They use a non-hierarchical structure,

where different people can lead the meetings. That was a really cool space for me to be part of because I haven't really been part of a meeting space that's that way, where people trade off who's leading, and it's more like facilitating a meeting. There are people who take stock and notes. We really divvy up the tasks. But I think that SJP has a really awesome impact on campus and it's really great that it's such a radical group and it's held through for so long.

Vanderscoff: So we've talked about a few of the different orgs. The final question is about MESH and your involvement with that.

Wildman: So, MESH is the Mixed Ethnicity Student Headquarters. That was really exciting for me to know that there was a space that existed for mixed race students. Because it's true that there are a lot of mixed race students, but how often do you have an ethnic org where you get to talk about the interesting space of kind of belonging to certain spaces, but not really, every. And so, there's this kind of in between—well, there are a lot of studies on mixed race. But there's something called the chameleon effect where you don't exactly—you kind of can fit in in different places, but not exactly. There are a lot of studies on it that are really interesting to me. Because I'm always interested in people's experiences being mixed race. I did a project on it my freshman year in one of my classes, where I interviewed different mixed students and I made a little blog on it. But anyway, MESH is a really important space because it allows for discussions led by students on things related to their identities as being mixed.

Currently, this year, it's been very small and mostly dominated—well, the presidents this year have been both men of mixed white and Asian background. In the years prior, though, I would say the leadership has been much more diverse. My first year, it was really great. And the first way that I found out about MESH was because they had a big conference where they had speakers, and it was a really positive space for me, and there were a lot of students there. But there were also some individuals that I struggled with in terms of the way that they spoke about issues and things. So, it's definitely—looking at the other orgs that I'm involved with now, it's

much more center, moderate. But also, just in terms of how some folks address issues around race, I definitely disagree with. I'm concerned about a lot of students. You know, there are privileges if you're mixed with white, for instance, or you look a certain way as being mixed race, and I think that students easily forget that when thinking about other ethnic orgs on campus.

I was pretty upset that recently the MESH representative in SUA reported back representing MESH by saying MESH was not really in support of the ABSA demands and they felt they were unpractical and they were worried they didn't reach out to all black students on campus. Which is a concern: did you reach out to the constituency? But when can you actually reach out to each individual student? There are only 500 ABC students on campus, or undergraduate students, sorry. And it's true that someone in our MESH group—she identifies as black Caribbean and white, and she was not asked about these specific demands. I think that MESH sometimes gets caught up in the politics of feeling left out of certain communities, which is totally understandable because there's a history of that. But I think that you should still support demands if some students feel those are necessary. So, I was worried about MESH's stances on things. But also, because MESH is such a small org, I feel it's not really representing what all mixed-race students on campus are necessarily feeling, which kind of was hypocritical in terms of what they asked ABSA about.

But I think that the MESH space has a lot of possibility. There are a lot of students who are mixed race on campus who I talk to, and we have great conversations about what it's like to be mixed, how it feels, how you can feel really one thing in a certain place, or that's the opposite. So basically, how you realize how you are so much not that one race or ethnicity when you're in that space, specifically for that race or ethnicity and vice versa, if that makes sense. So, having those kind of conversations is really interesting, having conversations about the exotification of mixed race people. I think that, in general, MESH has a possible great future but right now, it's

kind of lacking in outreach. And there are so many mixed students on campus, and most mixed students, or most students, don't even know that it exists.

I did do some tabling for it during the OPERS fall festival, so I probably brought a couple more people, so I helped with the tabling. But for the most part, it's a very small org and the discussion topics are usually chosen by the leadership. So, I think there are different ways that it could change so it's more involved in what students want to discuss.

But it's definitely been a positive space or me, especially my freshman year, when I was at Crown College that's mostly white. I was thinking a lot about my racial identity, about all my identities, and how to fit in in a place that was so different for me, and I felt so different. So, finding orgs was really great. And MESH was definitely one of those orgs that I found, where I was like, oh, I'm so happy this exists! But I don't feel it's as empowering of a space as it could be. I currently prefer being in other spaces. I have conversations with my friends about being mixed, so maybe it was just a stepping point to feel included in a community that I felt very different from.

But now I think maybe I can find that more in my other friend groups, or I'm thinking more about certain parts of my identities in a different way. I'm thinking more about being a Muslim American right now, because that's something that's very important in a time where I'm being politicized and being coined all these really derogatory things. And so, I guess maybe it's just that my identities that I'm thinking about right now are just in a different place and I'm not as focused on my mixed-race identity. However, I experience being mixed all the time, with a family that we don't necessarily look like we're one family to a lot of people, or blood-related, even, I mean, not that that matters. So, it still is something I think about. But anyways. I think if the space could change, that would be great. And it's one of those things that, if I could be president of it, that would be great, but I'm also doing so many different things. So, I guess I'm picking and choosing what orgs to get more involved in, where I see there being possible

futures. But hopefully MESH in the future continues and includes more students and is better at outreach, and maybe becomes a little more left and activist, because there's a lot of mixed-race activists out there.

Vanderscoff: Well on my end, that pretty much runs me through the outline. It's interesting, some of these things that you're highlighting, you're talking about them, how it then comes home for you. It becomes an opportunity for you then to reflect on coming from a mixed-race family. And you mentioned other things about the Mission— growing up in a changing neighborhood. And throughout our interview this time, you've reflected back to home. So, I just wonder, in closing, if there's anything you might like to say about reflecting where you come from, and then here, and what that dialectic is as you figure out your path here at UCSC.

Wildman: I think that in some ways I've been much more aware of my childhood and the place that I grew up and my values and my family and my identity, much more aware in college. I had to rethink it. In high school, I had to think it all, and figure it out. And I was like okay, now I know who I am. But in college, it was a whole other place. You have to refind yourself in a different place. And the way I found myself is very different in college than how I found myself in high school. I think I fit in way more in high school, or growing up in general, than coming here. There are a lot of battles that need to be fought here in terms of changing the campus to make it feel more inclusive towards people of color, towards LGBTQ students, towards undocumented students, towards Muslim students, towards all these students who are facing a lot of oppression through the university, but also just from other students, constantly. So, that's something that has been in the forefront of my time in college. Especially because of my major. I mean, if I wasn't a sociology major, if I did something STEM-related, I don't think I would be—I mean, I'd be aware of it, but I wouldn't be able to talk about it and I wouldn't be able to learn about it and understand it in a bigger sense, understand it on a systematic level of oppression and of these structural issues, and how deeply rooted they are and how hard it will be to uproot them. But I'm really glad that I've been learning about sociology. But it does take a mental toll

on you and learning about all these really difficult awful issues that we have that affect people so deeply, including myself. There's a very personal aspect to everything that you learn about, and it kind of weighs down on you.

I was recently talking with my friend and I'm like, "We're talking about all these things and it's so hard. But then we aren't really taught, oh, this is how to fix it." Because it's not simple. We don't even *know* how to fix it. If we knew how to fix it, we would have already been there, hopefully. But we don't know how to fix it. So, it's really a lot of thinking outside of the box, outside of capitalism, outside of all these things. And it's really hard to imagine that.

I think lots of times in college, you're learning all these difficult things, but it's like, where can I go from here because there are all these issues. I'm feeling inspired to try to make change with all the knowledge that I'm so privileged to be getting here at UC Santa Cruz, especially through my major, and trying to figure out what issues I want to focus on and how I'm going to go about that. So that's really exciting for me. And I want to do things related to California, either to the Bay Area, to Santa Cruz, San Francisco. Because that is my home and that feels very important to me.

I was planning on studying abroad my senior year but now I'm not quite sure. I think going abroad is a great idea, and I would love to go somewhere and learn there. But there're so many issues at home, it's hard for me to think about leaving. It's true that all issues, though, are related, so I think it would give me a really great perspective, like globally speaking. But I also feel very tied to the community on campus and there's a lot of work to be done on campus in terms of student organizing and the jobs that I'm involved in.

Vanderscoff: Great. I think that runs us through the remaining things we have. Thanks once again for coming back.

Wildman: Oh, thank you.

Vanderscoff: And for tying off some of these lingering questions that we have.

Wildman: Of course.

Vanderscoff: And so then on my end, we'll close out this record.

Wildman: All right, cool. (laughs)

Victor Garcia Zepeda

At the time of this interview, Victor Garcia-Zepeda was a senior in community studies and sociology, with a focus in public health. He was a Merrill College student and was very active in Merrill student government. He also worked as a program assistant for the Human Genomics Institute at UC Santa Cruz. Garcia-Zepeda grew up in Los Angeles and was undocumented until very recently, when he became a permanent resident of the United States.

I would like to dedicate this to my father, Victor Garcia, who passed away a few weeks ago. July 5th, 2017—Victor Garcia Zepeda

Vanderscoff: Okay. So today is Wednesday, April 19, 2017. And this is Cameron Vanderscoff here for the UC Santa Cruz Student Interviews oral history project. The way we've been starting this project out has been asking people to introduce themselves, identify themselves, in whatever words they choose.

Garcia Zepeda: All right. Thank you. My name is Victor Garcia Zepeda. I am currently a fourth-year sociology and community studies major. My main focus is in public health.

Vanderscoff: Oh, that's great. That's enough to get us started. So, our main focus here is going to be talking about your time at UCSC and your UCSC-related work and projects and affiliations. But an interest of this project is to develop a sense of what it is that you're bringing with you here. So, if you can just start us off by saying a little bit about where you're from, your background, a little bit of grounding in that way.

Early Background

Garcia Zepeda: Okay. I'm from the San Fernando Valley in L.A. County. I'm from Latino background, Mexican. I'm actually an undocumented student.[36] So, coming to UCSC was a great opportunity for me to continue my higher education. I had heard about a lot of the resources that were available here for AB 540 students, and coming from that background, I think that was really one of the most important things for me [in coming to UCSC]. One of the main programs that they had here over the summer, prior to attending school, was through the EOP office. They had a bridge program for AB 540 students to attend, so I was able to attend that and get oriented with the university and also meet some of the other AB 540 students. That really helped me out to start grounding myself at the university, meeting some of the faculty, and some of the financial aid advisors, too, and just some of the allies within the university that I felt comfortable with. I think that's really where it grew from—feeling a little bit more connected to the university. And especially having this trust for the administration and not really being scared of asking for help, or feeling that there were no resources for me at all. So that's something that's really grown with me and been with me since the initiation here.

[36] Garcia received permanent residency on June 28th, 2017 and is no longer AB 540.

Vanderscoff: So if that becomes your experience of entry to UCSC and finding a community of fellow undocumented students and then allies of undocumented students—if we can backtrack just a little bit, I wonder if we could flesh out a little bit more about how you came to that point. Perhaps we could start out, if you could just say a little bit about your family's attitude around education, your background around education, and then share a little bit about your own educational background, how you came to the point where you were applying to UCSC in the first place.

Garcia Zepeda: I went—my family, I guess I should start with that. My family, they value education a lot. But I did grow up in a predominantly Jehovah's Witness background. I grew up Jehovah's Witness. I no longer practice it. But a lot of my education came from that. They value education through your elementary up until high school, and then they warn you about going to college because of the disfellowship that might happen.

So, my parents were not that happy with me leaving to college. But I attended magnet schools in L.A, and they were always very adamant about telling me to go to college and getting prepared for college. So, I guess I was fortunate in that fact that I had a lot of help in getting here, especially my college counselor at Reseda High School. She knew about my story, and she knew about me being Jehovah's Witness, and having that struggle with my parents, about them giving me the opportunity to go to college, because I still needed their permission at that point. So, she helped me out with all my applications. She helped me out throughout the process with the SAT test; pretty much with everything, now that I look back on it. Her name is Ivna Gumão. She's still a great friend of mine. She really helped me in many ways, not just with the college application, but just in life in general. She's been a great mentor for me, too.

Throughout the application process, I was always talking to her. She mediated some meetings with my parents to try and help them cope with the idea of me leaving. Eventually I had to make this decision and head out to college and pretty much choose UCSC. One of the main reasons was also because it was farther away from home and I didn't want to be close to my parents, because I feel like they would have been too overbearing and it would have just not worked out.

I did get the backlash from the elders in my congregation and also from my family a little bit, but eventually they worked through it and it was fine. But definitely I would have to say that it was a hard time for me to decide to come to UC Santa Cruz.

Vanderscoff: Yes, that's something I'm really curious about. So how did you articulate to yourself and communicate to them why this was so important for you that you would go against the teachings of the congregation and your own parents' preferences?

Garcia Zepeda: I've been very vocal with my parents, and we're a very open family, so we talk about all of our ideas very openly. But it doesn't mean that it comes without a response on their side. So, bringing that up with them, they were not happy, like I said. And they did try to convince me not to go. So, I had to really promise them that nothing bad was going to happen with me leaving and that this was just for me to enrich my education and make a future for myself, and to eventually help them out, too.

They valued education so much, because when they came to America—they don't really talk about their story of coming here, actually. When I hear it from other students, or from other individuals telling me about their stories of coming to America, they always have a story behind it. I just know that my parents wanted to move to the United States

because their parents were already here, or rather, my mom's parents were already here, so they wanted to be closer to them.

I was two years old at the time when I moved, or when they moved here, so I don't remember anything. But I do know that they always valued education and that they wanted me to get somewhere. They wanted me to become a lawyer, a doctor, or the usual, like, I guess, what my parents thought a college education would get me to.

I tried to convince them with that aspect of my life, and to convince them that all that was going to happen was I was going to go get my degree, and try and get a good job, and be able to help them out in the future. But their biggest concern was my disfellowship from the congregation, me becoming some sort of alcoholic and drug addict and becoming sexually immoral, according to their doctrine (Jehovah's Witness religious doctrine). Which I don't think really happened. (laughter) I mean, I'm still here and they're happy. But it was a time that we had a lot conflict with each other. And it was something I was not really used to with my parents. I've always been "the good child," I guess, quote unquote. So, it was kind of hard for them to see me disobey them, or go against what they were saying.

And even within the congregation, I was held at a high level within the congregation. So, everyone was very surprised that I was leaving for college. Or, even prior to that, even when I was applying, they were like, "Why are you applying to these schools that are really far away?" Some were out of the state. And a lot of them were like, "Why are you doing this? Why don't you stay here? You have so much potential here."

At that point, maybe I took a selfish track. I don't know. For me, it was just a moment that I wanted to be liberated from all of that. I wanted to make something for myself. So, I definitely wanted to move out of the L.A. County area.

Choosing UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: So then in that setting, do you mind sharing how you heard about UC Santa Cruz for the first time? And then walk us through the decision to apply and accept here.

Garcia Zepeda: Yeah. Actually, I had never heard about UC Santa Cruz. I thought it was close to Santa Barbara, just because of the name. My counselor was the one who told me to apply here, and she told me to apply to a few of the other UCs. But I didn't know anything about it other than the recommendation from my counselor.

So then, when they sent out the acceptance letters, then that's kind of when I actually did my research. I never even had visited UC Santa Cruz. And I didn't visit until I had already accepted the admissions and I'd already told my parents, "Okay, I'm going to go here. We should go and visit it just so you get a chance to see it." So, I had no idea of anything about UC Santa Cruz.

I think one of the largest factors was that they had offered me the best financial package. There was another school that was closer to home that my parents really wanted me to go to, Cal Lutheran. My counselor actually works there now, actually. She would always talk about Cal Lutheran, how it's a great school and it's really small, and all these great things about it. But the financial package they gave me was close to nothing and my parents would not be able to afford to pay for that. They thought they would. But

looking into it now, I'm glad I chose UC Santa Cruz because they would not have been able to afford Cal Lutheran. And I'm so glad I still came over here.

So, I think that for me, personally, the main factor was it was far away from home and the financial package was a lot better. But again, I didn't know anything about UC Santa Cruz until that day I came with my family. I remember driving up High Street and coming onto the main entrance to campus. The main entrance says "UC Santa Cruz" and then you see that little admissions office. But then you start going in farther in and then you see this huge field where there's nothing. And I was like, "Are we in a farm?" My parents were also like, "This is the university you're coming to?" We kept driving. And I think we came during spring break, so there were no students on campus; it was really lonely. I didn't make an appointment to get a tour or anything. It was just us coming up here to see it. So, there was no activity happening on campus. I didn't know anything like where the academic buildings were at.

That day, we eventually drove up near Science Hill, up by the north remote parking lot. And we parked there. We were really lost. We didn't know where we were at. I was thinking to myself, where are all the academic buildings? Where am I going to be? I didn't understand any of it. I was kind of used to the framework that UCLA had, or USC, or CSU Northridge—the schools that were close to me that I kind of knew. They're very centralized and the academic buildings are very prominent. And here I was like, I'm in the middle of the woods. My family—they were kind of scared about it, too, once they actually saw it. They were like, "Is this really a university?"

And then something that I tried to avoid my parents from seeing, because I saw it as soon as I came in—I think that was somewhere in College Nine or Ten and there were

some windows and you could see liquor bottles. I was trying to avert my parents from seeing that. So, I was like turning them over to another side. But I think my mom did notice and then she brought up like, "You're going to come here?" And then she gave me a whole spiel about how she was not happy with me coming over here. And that if I was sure—I think at that point, my parents knew that I was old enough to make my own decision—but also, they were like, okay, but we still care for you and we want to make sure that you're going to be safe. So, they kept asking me, "Are you sure you want to come here? Are you positive that you're going to be all the way over here?" And they would kind of try to convince me not to. They would be like, "You're going to be far away. If anything happens, we're not going to be close enough to take you to the hospital, or take care of you." Which at the moment I didn't really—I mean, I'm a first-generation student, so I didn't really understand what college was going to be like, and I didn't really know the expectations of how involved your parents should be. And also, I think just the whole process—from the application process to the moving in till the, I guess even till now—there's still things I'm learning that sometimes I wish I had known prior to coming. Or I wish my parents had gone to college, so then I wouldn't have to be dealing with these things now. I would have at least been warned about them.

Vanderscoff: So what was your response to all that? You're here. You've seen this campus. It's this campus in the woods. You're going around. You don't see much sign of life. You see liquor bottles behind a window and your parents are getting concerned about you coming this far away. So, what's your answer to that? I mean, what's shaping in your head about this place? And how do you ultimately make the decision to follow through?

Garcia Zepeda: Once I actually came here, I was—to be honest, I was a little scared. I was wondering, is this really what I wanted? I started questioning myself and questioning the idea of actually moving all the way over here on my own and being able to navigate this new environment. But I'm the type of person, once I make a decision or once I've thought about it and I vocalize it, then it's done. I have to do it. If I don't go through with it, I would feel very guilty about it because I didn't follow through with something that I had told myself I was going to do and that I had told others. So, at that point, I was not going to go back on it.

And also, I think the idea of being away from my parents was something I really wanted—just the space to actually be myself. I say that because my last year in high school was also a time of a lot of reflection for me. It was also during the time that I was struggling with my sexuality and really understanding who I was. And even within the church setting, or the kingdom hall, I started to deviate a little bit. I don't know if it was really depression, or I was stressed, or anxiety, but I started to do less and less work within the church. I was helping with some of the activities or some of the, I don't know if they're really called rituals, but some of the facilitation needed. I was really confused. I had grown up with this doctrine and idea that homosexuality was bad and that you're not supposed to have those thoughts. But at the same time, I was also taught to always question everything and to always do my own research on things. Maybe my parents think that's dangerous now. (laughs)

I would always be like, well, if this God that they talk about is so loving and great and all these other things, then why is there so much division within our religion? And why is there so much hatred still fomented from it? Maybe not expressive hate, but I felt like

there were a lot of micro aggressions within the church about people and their thoughts on some of the things that are looked down upon within our church.

But, like I said, I was very confused at the moment and I didn't know what to think. So, that's why I was really excited about leaving, because I needed that space to actually think and be able to be myself. Even looking back on it now, I felt like my whole life I was never really me. I was just this molding of whatever the religion had taught me to do. I grew up with it since I was born. I was always taught to be a certain type of person, always act a certain way. I was not allowed to make friends with other people who were not the same religion as me. In school, it was just go to school and come back. I could never really participate in extracurriculars unless they were within the school timeframe. But after school I was supposed to come back home. Go preaching on Saturdays and pretty much every other day if I could. Be active in the Kingdom Hall church, which meant preparing speeches, preparing readings. It's a very intensive religion, I would have to say.

It was also all in Spanish. So, I think that's where my Spanish was actually cultivated a lot more. My parents, they only speak Spanish in the house, so English was only taught for me in the school setting, once I started. In pre-K, I also went to a bilingual school. At first Spanish was taught to me still, but then it went on to English. But at home, it was all Spanish. And then within the religion, it was also all Spanish. So that's where I learned how to write in Spanish. And also, they teach you a lot of public speaking and how to articulate yourself in settings where you're talking to people or large audiences. I find that helpful, actually. I'm glad I did go through that. The doctrine is something I'm not so proud of. But I think I went on a rant here.

Vanderscoff: No, I think this all really sets the stage for you coming to Santa Cruz, the point you're at in your life, the points of discovery in your own life that you're having about your faith and sexuality and who you are and what's next. So, I'd like to stay with all those threads. One thing that you mentioned is that your first in-depth exposure to this place was learning about resources for undocumented students, and Bridge. So, I'm wondering if you could share how you learned about those resources or were connected to them? And say a little more about that first real exposure to the campus.

Summer Bridge Program

Garcia Zepeda: Yeah. So, after that visit to UC Santa Cruz with my parents, we went back. And at that point, I had already accepted the admissions. So, a few weeks after that, I got a call from Ana Navarrete. I believe she still works here on campus.[37] At that point, she was one of the student interns, or student volunteers in the EOP office. And she had called to see if I was interested in this summer bridge program for undocumented students. I don't even remember how they found out I was undocumented. Because I know the university, I think the only people that are allowed to know that information is the financial aid office. So maybe the financial aid office released those names just to help them be able to network with other undocumented folks. I'm not sure if I checked some box saying that I was interested in undocumented services. That, I don't remember.

But they offered me to come—it was a week-long thing. And I accepted. It was prior to summer orientation. It was like a week prior to it. So, sometime in July, I think, was

[37] Ana Navarrete worked as a counselor for the Educational Opportunity Programs (Undocumented Student Services) until summer of 2016.

when I came. I was excited about that. I didn't know what to expect, but it was the first time I was going to go be with other college students and really be exposed to what I thought was the college life. And my parents were fine with it. They wanted me to go see if I actually liked it. For them, it was kind of like okay, maybe he's not going to like it, so he'll come back.

It was my first time coming to Santa Cruz by myself. I didn't even know which route to take or anything. I think that time I took the Amtrak, which was a ten-hour [ride] all the way over here. It was two buses and then a train and then another bus, and then another bus from San Jose to Santa Cruz, on Highway 17. So, by the time I got here, I was really tired.

We were staying at Oakes. But then, I remember something had happened—this was the first year that they had accepted many undocumented students. I think we were a cohort of like sixty students. And it was the first time they were doing this program where it was a week-long orientation, so there were a lot of mishaps that happened as far as planning and logistics. One of them was housing. We were initially supposed to stay at Oakes within the dorms, but there was a problem and the administration within Oakes—I believe, there had been some mishap.

So, we all got moved to off-campus locations. There was luckily one house that was—it was a huge house, from what I remember. We all stayed there. We were all in the living room or other people's rooms. Some of the other mentors were going to be like our RAs for that time being. But I think that was one of the main things that got us to all get connected to each other. Now that I think back on it, it was a very intimate setting. Because we were all in the living room sitting across from each other, or sleeping across

from each other. Even if we didn't want to be that close to each other, we were going to have to be that close.

And then that same night, I think, when the van was coming in with all the students, they hit the water pipe. It started bursting out all the water, so it messed up the plumbing. So, we didn't have access to one of the bathrooms or the showers for three or four days, I believe. So, the next morning, we had to wake up even earlier, I think it was six a.m. or something, and go to the gym here on campus to get showered and get ready, and then go on all the other activities that we had for the day. There were a lot of mishaps that happened throughout this whole week. But for me, it was not really a big deal. I was excited about all the activities we were going to do and to really learn about what UC Santa Cruz was.

There were a lot of students. I got to learn a lot from where they were coming from. Some of them were from my same hometown and we're still friends till this day. I think that's really what helped out a lot. They still continue to do that program and I know it's been growing and growing.

The first day of classes, we [already] knew where the classes were. We knew some of the faculty already. We had our own little network, so we didn't feel so lost on that first day. We would help each other out. If we were in the same classes, it was like okay, I see a familiar face, I can go sit with that person. You didn't feel alone. A lot of these students continue to have this network. Some of them graduated because they were transfer students, but I still keep in touch with them. And you're happy to also see them succeed in what they're doing. And just keeping in touch helps to keep that network going and help other students that are coming in as well. I value that a lot. It was really helpful.

I also remember meeting the financial aid advisor, Liz Martin-Garcia. She has been a great friend to this day. I almost consider her my second mom. She's helped me out a lot. I think that she is great and I feel like a lot of the other AB 540 students would say the same thing—she's a great resource and a great person that's always advocating for us within the financial aid office. She understands where we come from and our struggles. We all have such different stories. Like I remember we had one night where we were all sitting down in the ARC center. And we were all in a circle. And we all just started—for some reason, we all just started saying our stories of how we got here and our lives. I don't think I'll ever forget that. A lot of people broke down and they really opened up about their stories. Some of them were really intense. I think that connected us a lot more to each other and really helped in getting to know each other and to be there for one another. Regardless of where we came from geographically, we all had a similar goal: to better our lives and help those who had helped us. To this day, I see a lot of them and I feel like we've grown so much from that first day of our initial—like you know, when you say your ice breakers. Like, "Hi, I'm Victor. I'm from L.A." Because at that point, I didn't really know what to say. I was like, do most people know where Lake View Terrace is? So, then I was like okay, I'll just say L.A. And then if somebody else was from L.A., they'd be like, "Oh, what part of L.A.?" And then I'd be like, "Well, I'm actually from the San Fernando Valley." "Oh, me, too." So, it kind of broke down to that. And then others were from the Bay Area. That's when I started learning more about the Bay Area. It's like me, Southern California—didn't know that much about NorCal, so learning more about them, too, helped. I don't know. There's just so much that I look back on. Now I'm so grateful for being able to go through that and meeting all these people.

There was also this lunch that we had with—I think it was all the provosts and then some other faculty. At the time, I didn't know Elizabeth Abrams, the provost for Merrill. I was sitting at the table with Faye Crosby. I think she was Cowell's provost. I was speaking with her and felt really close to her for some reason. I think it's just her demeanor. She seems very approachable. And then she introduced me to Elizabeth because she had asked me, "Oh, what college are you going to be at?" Then I told her, "Merrill." And she's like, "Oh, the Merrill provost is here."

So, she introduced me to Elizabeth. And at the moment, I was very intimidated by Elizabeth, for some reason. I didn't really connect with her at that moment. I felt like okay, she gave me her business card and she said hi. All right. I don't think I'll ever talk to her. But now it's funny, because I'm really close to Elizabeth. She's also been a great mentor for me. But just that initial introduction to her—I was so intimidated by her. For me, it's kind of funny that now that whole relationship has changed.

And some of the other allies that I met, they really helped me out throughout all of these years here at the university. At the time, the dean of students, Alma Sifuentes, I remember her speaking. Her story really inspired me—where she came from; where she started out; and the position she was in at that moment. That was very inspirational. Hearing it from her and just being so close to her in that moment—it just made it so much easier to talk to these people, or to be able to go to my professor's office hours once classes were in session. I felt like I didn't have that fear. So, for me, I think, even though I was first generation and wasn't really exposed to what college was going to be like, that orientation week really helped me in gaining some of that experience and gaining some of those resources that I didn't even know existed. '

At my high school, there were a few other undocumented students. And really the resources offered here, and then hearing their experiences at their universities or their colleges, and how they were struggling—I wish that a lot of the resources that were available to us here at UC Santa Cruz were available to them, too. I remember some of them saying that they were sleeping in their cars, or having to go and like pretty much sleep at the campus, in the libraries or something, because they didn't have access to some of the resources that we have here. And also, just having to take on two jobs to be able to pay their bills at the university, or dropping out. Some of them couldn't afford it. I wish I could help them out somehow. But I'm very grateful for the resources available here.

Coming to UC Santa Cruz: Merrill College

Vanderscoff: So you have the opportunity to get this early exposure to some of the resources here. And that proves to be very important to your story, to your beginning here, to finding a beginning here, some traction. I'd like to go a little bit further into some of your earlier time here at UCSC. And one question that we should get on the record is how did you wind up at Merrill in particular?

Garcia Zepeda: Merrill—it was during that time where you decide which college you want. I don't think Merrill was actually my first choice. Looking back on it, it was probably College Nine or Ten, one of those two, with international relations, or something like that. I don't even remember their title. But I'm pretty sure Merrill was either my second or third choice. I don't regret being there now, but at the moment, kept hearing about people saying, "Oh, yeah, Merrill is not that great. You have to walk all the way up that hill." Nobody really even showed me where Merrill was. They kept

pointing up there, "Yeah, it's all the way up there. We're not going to go there." None of the tour guides would ever take us there during that week of orientation.

So, one day I decided to go up there on my own. And I think a few other students who also were going to be part of Merrill, they went up there, too. It was under construction at the moment, because they were remodeling. And we were kind of like, "Oh, so this is our college." There was construction everywhere, so I couldn't even really see it. I was kind of unimpressed at the moment.

I think what really changed it was the orientation week at Merrill College when school actually started, or that first week prior to classes. All the Welcome Week activities really helped to get me excited about college and get me excited about Merrill. I remember that first day moving in, it was raining. I think it was the first time it had rained in a few years on move-in day. That made things a lot more difficult, especially for students who were up higher in the building that had to move all their stuff. They had to go quickly. Luckily, I was on the first floor, so I got my stuff down quickly. But then I lost my mom, because she had to go drive the car back down to the East Remote, and I had to stay there. We didn't know the university that well at the moment, so she got a little lost. But I managed to find her.

After that, I remember being soaking wet. I was just really tired and I just wanted to go to sleep. But there was some activity still going to happen that night. I forgot the title that they had. Now I know it's Merrill: The Musical. But at the Welcome Week, the guide said something about a mandatory meeting. It was kind of a surprise. I just remember walking into the cultural center, sitting down. I was like, okay, this is going to be an introduction to some information. And then you start seeing these people

standing up within the audience. Now I know they were RA and orientation leaders. Then the show starts. For me, that was really exciting. I thought this was something that was happening at all the other colleges, but then after talking to some of my other friends that were in other colleges, they said no, that didn't really happen. So, I felt a little special. I was like, okay, we have something that you didn't get.

And then some of the other activities that they had during that week were some of the tours. But I didn't really get a chance to go on all the activities because I think most of them happened on Saturday and Sunday and I had promised my parents I would go to the Kingdom Hall here. I still had not broken off from the Jehovah's Witness church. 'Yet. I was still going. So, I had to go, and go preach, and then go to the meeting on Sunday. So, I didn't get to experience a lot of my first week, but I did get to see that show. And then I think Moat Jam, I went to, which was that first dance. But at the time, I was that awkward kid that didn't—because I was not used to all this. My parents allowed me to go to prom and dances and stuff. But since I didn't talk to many people, or I didn't really have friends that I considered friends—I considered them acquaintances, because that's the way I grew up with it—it was a little more difficult to connect with people.

And then my roommates were both computer science majors and they were kind of introverts. So, they didn't really want to go to the dance [but] both of them did come. They wanted to see what the whole commotion was because we were on the first floor and it was happening right outside our window. But I remember we were kind of just standing there. It was an awkward moment, but even just standing there, I felt connected with the other students. It was still something I wanted to experience.

Vanderscoff: I'm wondering if you could share some stories about those first few quarters you're at UCSC. This could be talking about the Merrill core [course], or early GEs, or social experiences that you have. And just go further into this experience of locating yourself here.

Garcia Zepeda: The first thing—so I guess this kind of goes back into high school. My last year was a year where I'd really gotten involved in high school, with the student organizations and some of the clubs. So, I told myself, okay, I definitely want to get involved when I get to college, and I want to do something. I was really interested in languages at the time, and volunteer work, and the library because I was really good friends with the librarian at my high school. So that was the first thing I was looking for.

So, I remember going to that OPERS—

Vanderscoff: The fair.

Student Government

Garcia Zepeda: Right. I was trying to look for all the language clubs. There was really no French club, no Romance language club, what I was used to. So, then I was like, okay, well what else is there? There were the fraternities, but I was not really interested in that. I did sign up for a lot of clubs and I went to many of them. I think SUA and the student Committees on Committees were two that I signed up to. I went, but I didn't really feel that the SUA was the space where I wanted to be.

But then I do remember Merrill had their own mini little resource fair. And Merrill Student Government was there. I think the vice chair at the moment, Justin, was there, and he was talking about the student government and how it functions. I was like okay,

this sounds interesting. I'll go to the first meeting and I'm thinking about it. So, I go to the first meeting and I was really interested in it. And that's kind of where I started my path in student government.

I got really involved. I managed to get one of the positions within the student government. My first year I was the representative for the student Committees on Committees for Merrill. I was excited to have a title and to be the representative. All the other nine colleges had their own representative. I felt like sometimes I was too enthusiastic about things. But I learned a lot from being on that position. I remember we had a sister college event. I think it was Alexis—I forgot her last name—but she was the Crown representative: we worked on an event together. We showed a movie and gave food and prizes. Learning how to plan events for this large scale was new for me. I really liked it. And that kind of helped me out with learning how to plan events and learning a lot of the inner logistics of the university, and the procedures you have to go through to get the approvals, and the people you have to talk to, and requesting rooms and stuff like that. 'So that was great.

And then just being involved in student government. Student government is a great opportunity for students to voice their opinion. And I thought, why is not everybody in this right now and trying to talk about what's going on and really make a change for the college and the university as a whole, which I think was a main thing for me to continue to kind of foment that idea of student engagement and student voices, which then later on was where I got into running for chair. That was my main platform, was making Merrill Student Government a little bit more known, and also creating that cohesive environment. Because there was a lot of division between the RAs, the student government and the PAs, program assistants, at the college. I wanted to bring all that

together with the faculty and with the administration. I'll talk a little bit more about that later, but that was something that I started noticing that I really wanted to help build.

Merrill Core Course

Core course—I really wanted to get close to Fran Guerra, my professor. I've had her for other classes, too, since I'm a sociology major. She was my professor for *Intro to Sociology*, *Research Methods* and another course that I can't remember at the moment. But every time I would go to her office hours I felt like she was a little bit—I think she got excited about a lot of things, so it was kind of hard to gauge her at times. But she's also been a great resource when I had questions about where I wanted to go with my own research and my own trajectory within sociology.

And in core course, I remember feeling, I guess her excitement came on to me. And though some students didn't really enjoy her going on tangents about her stories, I really enjoyed that. I loved hearing about her experiences and how the little things in her life shaped her. I remember one of her stories. She's from New York. So, she would talk a lot about her experience there, and how different the culture is in New York to California. And she would also talk about her own experience as a lecturer, and how she's constantly seeking education, and how she's constantly trying to get more degrees. I don't know how many degrees she has, but she's always doing something. So, seeing her, I felt like that's what I wanted in a college professor because sometimes I go into classes and now it's just like, "Here's the Powerpoint, learn from it. And here's the test. Write a paper." I miss that critical thinking and engagement and really being able to discuss a topic from almost every perspective, and see why it is that people think in that way, versus this is one way to look at it, and this is the politically correct way of

seeing it, which I understand, but at the same time, I want to see the other perspectives, so that I can, I guess, counter-argue their perspectives.

But core course, for me—I remember one of the books that really resonated with me was *Dreaming in Cuban.* That book resonated with me. One, it was a story of a family feeling disconnected through generations, and also through the immigrating to a new country. I felt connected to that. I think, though I am an immigrant, I felt more connected to the aspect of the generational gap and how, though they had come through a similar struggle, the daughter and the mother, how different their lives were. The daughter was more preoccupied with the idea of where her life was going and the mother was more like—I need to continue to be productive and make a better life for my children. That feels like my family. They're working and they're trying to provide for the family, but where are their goals and their dreams other than that? I mean, I understand that that might be their goal, to make a better life for their children. But I also want to know what were their initial goals? I've never asked them. Maybe I should. But for me, I think it's where am I going in life? And feeling disconnected from my parents in that way. So that's why that resonated with me.

Fran would always talk about questioning everything and not always taking everything that was said, even by lecturers, as a fact, and that's the only way you should see it. She always taught us to do our own research and to look into the facts and fact check. Like during the elections, all those fact checks that came out. Like okay, well, this is not really the truth. You should look into this. So that was important to me, too. And always kind of being skeptical about things. I don't think it's made me cynical, though. I think I question a lot more things now.

Studying Sociology

Vanderscoff: So you started to have these educational experiences that point you towards critique and towards research. Would you mind sharing about your path to your major of sociology?

Garcia Zepeda: Yeah. I was going to be a global economics major. That's the route I thought I was going to go through. My parents were happy with that. But I started noticing I didn't enjoy it. Also, because of the math aspect. I'm terrible at math, so I was not happy with that at all. I also missed writing. I think the core course had prepared me for that. I was like, okay, so when do I get to write more? But in economics, all you do is write the theory really quick, maybe it's a paragraph long about why certain things happen, and I don't even remember that much about it—why is this regression the way it is? Or something in that. I don't remember much of it.

But I missed writing. I was like, should I change my major? What should I do? So, I talked to almost every advisor I can think of. I remember going to the Economics Department and trying to talk to them. But it didn't feel welcoming. First, they screen you because you have to talk to the student interns or student peer advisors there. And then they automatically just start writing down your four-year plan and then that's it. I wanted to talk to the actual advisor but you had to make an appointment. It just felt like she was very unapproachable. It just seemed like either you get it or you don't.

Then I talked to the Career Center. I talked to Beth Thompson (Merrill Academic Preceptor). I talked to pretty much everyone I could think of. My financial aid advisor and I talked to EOP. I was trying to figure out what should I major in, what should I do? I even took that test on the Career Center website—what major should you be? And it

came up with something in the arts, communications. Communications was actually the highest one. I don't think sociology was really on there, but it did come under communications. But since we didn't offer communications, I was like okay, what do I do?

Beth had recommended me to go to sociology and to talk to the department chair there. So, I did. And it was a total different experience speaking with Tina. She was a lot more approachable. I felt so at ease speaking with her. Everything she was telling me about how it was going to go—it seemed so doable that from the moment I was like okay, I'm really happy. I want to go this route.

And then going into the classes in sociology, it was a lot more of the topics that interest me. And the courses, too, I was really excited about them. And learning about what sociology was—I thought it was just like the study of people and society. But now actually really delving into it; every interaction I have now, I'm [seeing] through a sociological lens. I'm like, why is it that us as a society view these things? All these questions that I've always kind of had were manifested even more within the courses. So that's something I really enjoyed.

Community Studies

And then after a while I found out about the community studies major. I think for some time it was not funded. So, there was not even a lot of marketing for it, I would say. So then when I found out about it, I was like, this is really interesting. I want to know more about it. So, I talked to the department chair there. I think it was Judith, but I might be wrong. I don't remember her name at the moment. But then I told her I was sociology, if I could still double major. And she said yeah. So, I took some of the introductory

courses. I was really excited about the six-month field study. And also, it felt like community studies was the hands-on approach to everything I was learning in the theory base of sociology. So, seeing it that way, I was like okay, I'll get my theory and then I'll get the actual practice out of it. So that was one of the main reasons I also double-majored in community studies.

Vanderscoff: Yes. So, I'd love to follow those threads further. We can also loop back and talk about some of your involvement in Merrill and some of those areas. But if we go a little further with sociology and community studies right now.

Garcia Zepeda: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: If you could just share where there were key watershed moments for you in classes, or any key projects that you might like to talk about as being emblematic of the growth that you were just describing in these courses of study.

Garcia Zepeda: Yeah. One of the courses that I took, *Health in Conflicts* (taught by Kali Rubaii*)*—I never thought I would be interested in public health, or in health in general. I thought it was something in the STEM majors and it was in the biology sector. I was done with biology. I'd taken three years of it, AP Bio, and I was just not fond of it anymore. But taking that class, it really made me reflect on what health means in the public sector, and what it means for society. And especially because in that class, we talked about how during times of conflict, like war, health is sometimes ignored, or we choose to not really talk about the effects of it. We talk more about death and injuries, but we don't really talk about the after effects, or even just the effects happening during— We talked about Fallujah in Iraq and how a lot of the fire pits that they have there and their emissions were causing a lot of birth defects and cases of cancers. I think

that course really started helping me think about health in a broader spectrum and how it affects us in the sociological aspect. I don't know what I'm trying to articulate. I guess what I'm trying to say is that how all these social factors—they're not visible maybe [but they] can also affect your health. I mean, some of them *are* visible, like your race, your class, or geographically where you are. But also, what your upbringings are, what maybe your culture is like, where it is that you stand in the socioeconomic background of your life and the resources available to you. I had never really realized that all these things do affect your health and health outcomes. That course really helped in me thinking of health in that way, and not just in the aspect of the clinical setting.

In community studies, you have to choose if you want to go into the economic justice framework of your courses, or if you want to go into health justice. I decided to go with health justice. I was really interested in it but I didn't really know where it was going to take me. I learned a lot more about myself and also where I wanted to go with it once I started learning more about my field study, and once I was on my field study, and even coming back from my field study and the experience of it helped me in that growth and really knowing what I want to do.

Vanderscoff: So maybe this is a good chance to talk a little further about that field study.

Garcia Zepeda: Yeah. It's funny because the field study kind of encompasses everything, or pretty much all the people that I've met here at UC Santa Cruz. I think it was my sophomore year, I went to a conference—Elizabeth had invited me with some other alumni—in Sacramento on Cuban-American relations. It was a discussion facilitated by this emeritus professor. And he was just going to talk about, I think

President Obama had just declared, or he had just said something about Cuba being open again.

Vanderscoff: That move toward normalizing, right.

Garcia Zepeda: Yeah, so the discussion was focused on that. And I remember meeting Tamu Nolfo there. She works as a consultant, I believe, for the California Department of Health. She is a very energetic, and her way of speaking is just very impactful, and her character—it's one of those characters that you're just attracted to, to listening and engaging with these types of people. So, she talked about her mother's experience of—it was a Doctors without Borders kind of situation. I don't remember the exact title of what her mother did, but they would train people—I don't know if they were trained here or they were trained in Cuba because of their medical program—but it was to help out and stay there. So, talking a little bit more about that, she really engaged me. So, I continued the conversation with her.

And then coming back to UC Santa Cruz, I took the Career and Public Service class that they offered. It was the first year. I remember Elizabeth telling me about it. I was all excited like yeah, I want to take this class, it sounds like a great experience. It was taught by Cynthia Chase, who's now the mayor of Santa Cruz. At that moment, she was vice mayor. Tamu Nolfo was one of the guest speakers. And again, hearing her talk and what she was doing. And at the moment, I was also seeking a field study. I was trying to figure out where I was going to go. I knew I wanted to do something in the health-related aspect. I was a little bit more interested in mental health within the Latino population.

So, I talked to her and I asked her if she knew of anyone. And she was like, "Well, you should email me. I think I know a few people." So, I emailed her that night and then the next morning I get another email. And cc'ed on it was a whole bunch of people from different departments. (I had asked her if she knew anyone in New York City.) And there were some people from some nonprofits, a lot of people from the Department of Health there, and then some people from other government agencies. And the one that initially reached out was Dr. Aletha Maybank in the Center for Health Equity at the New York City Department of Health. She said, "Yeah, we would love to have you. Send us your resume and what your project will be on." So, I sent her that, but then I never really got a response back. But in my mind, I was like, okay, this is the person I'm going to be working with.

But then, one of the other people also replied. She was just, I think two floors down, now that I look back on it. She was on the sixth floor, I think. And she was in the HIV and, I think it was like HIV/STI prevention, or no, Sexual and Reproductive Health Department. And she was like, "Send us your resume, too, and we'll see if we can bring you in."

So, I did that. And then she actually asked for a face-to-face interview, which at the moment, I couldn't. I told her, "Can we do Facetime or Skype or Google Hangout or something?" And she said, "Unfortunately, we don't have the technology for that, so we won't be able to. And we won't be able to bring you in." This was told to me literally a day before my contract was due with the community studies program in order for me to go on the field study. If I didn't have anything, I wouldn't be able to go on the field study.

I freaked out. I was like, what am I going to do? Who am I going to talk to? And Aletha Maybank had never really answered back. I was really worried. So, I talked to one of the other people within that thread of emails. I can't remember her name right now, but she worked for one of the nonprofits. She told me, "I'll you can find out where you can work here with me. And I'll put you in, I'll sign the paperwork and everything. But first, try to contact Aletha and see if there's any response to that email you had sent, or if there's anything that she can do. And if not, then I'll take you in."

I was like, "Thank you. That's saving me right now, because I need to turn this in by tomorrow."

So, I emailed Aletha. And then within minutes I get a reply back saying, "Yes, we'll take you in. Sorry for the delay." Now I understand why it all happened. But at the moment I was like, "No, that's fine." Then she said, "Can you just send the paperwork and we'll sign it?" And they signed it really quick, sent it back. Then I thanked the other person, I can't remember her name. I thanked her for helping me and giving me the opportunity to do that. And then I bring all the paperwork and I'm running into the office at community studies to show them, "Yay, I got in!" They were really excited, too.

And then it was now to get prepared for that field study. The prep for field study, of course, helped me, in knowing a little bit more. But at the same time, I think that most of the learning about what the environment was and everything was actually being there, because nothing really prepared me for that whole new environment. I remember going to financial aid and talking to Liz and being like, "Okay, what am I going to do? Here's the budget I'm thinking of, but I may be wrong on some of the things." She helped me out with that, too. I'm so glad that I had the network that I had and the

people that I knew. I'm glad I went to that conference with Elizabeth. And I'm glad that I talked with Tamu. And that I was able to have this network and be able to get their help and find this placement.

Fast forwarding to my first day in New York City, I was really overwhelmed at first. I stayed with a friend in Brooklyn, the Clinton Hill area.

The Department of Health was in Queens, in Long Island City. So, from Brooklyn I took the G train, and it was a few stops away. It was like a thirty-minute commute. So, it was close. I just remember it was a Citi Bank, but I don't remember the stop.

I remember walking into the building and I felt so—I was not used to walking into this type of building. It's not that big, it was like twenty-eight floors. But the security—I was very overwhelmed by the security. It seemed like a government building at that point. I was not really sure what I was going to do. But I still walked in the first day; I got in through security. Go upstairs. And I couldn't get through the doors because I was really at a loss. And then I was walking in and I see Dr. Maybank. I remembered her face, because I had seen her emails and her little picture came up, and some of the videos she had sent. So, I recognized her and I was talking to her. Then I was introduced to her assistant, who became really my supervisor because she was always busy and in conferences or meetings. She was a deputy commissioner and she was also the director of the Center for Health Equity, so she was really busy all the time. So, I had a few interactions with her.

That first day was the most exciting day for me, just getting acquainted with everything and meeting all these people. At first it was just so many titles and I still didn't really

understand the culture there. I was still trying to absorb everything. But I miss it now. It was a great experience and I loved everything about it.

Vanderscoff: So you go and you do your field studies. If you think about your time there in New York working with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, what were the key takeaways for you that you brought back to your study here at UCSC?

Garcia Zepeda: I think it was the culture there. The priority there is in helping out people. And also, the way that they do it—it's not in the sense of the savior mode, but more in the sense that we want to help provide the resources with the help of your own community. So, in other words, participatory community action research. So, a lot of the community was involved with the Department of Health and we worked together in developing plans and projects that would help out the community and also provide the resources for the community, and also for the Department of Health to gain trust within the community. Because in the years prior there had been, I guess, some mistrust from the Department of Health. So, they wanted to help bridge that gap that had existed.

A lot of their initiatives were very community-based; even the commissioner, her whole platform was on dismantling racism within the Department of Health and increasing health equity and seeing everything, as they said, through a social lens and a racial justice lens, which I really admired.

Coming back to Santa Cruz, I noticed that I was even a lot more critical about things. Having that experience helped me [find] meaning in the work I was doing. I was a lot more excited about my classes and I really wanted to know how this class was going to help me in understanding a particular subject. And also, how the research I was going to do, or the work that I was going to do—how that was going to help X and X. By that,

I mean communities or individuals. And also, how I was going to do that and if it was doable, and what the motive behind it was. Also, something that I noticed that we did a lot was always questioning the overall objective of our projects. That we did a lot in the Department of Health and that I brought with me, too: who are we really trying to help and how is this going to affect them?

For example, I was working with the Proyecto Comunidades Florecientes which is the Flourishing Communities Project, which focused on the Latino population in New York City and four key areas—childhood obesity, parental mental health, access to care in general, and infant mortality rates. We were working with the Latino community in developing plans and policies and projects that would help alleviate some of these health outcomes and increase their healthy health outcomes. So, some of the questions that came up, especially when we were working with the indigenous community, was how are we going to do this in a way that's not going to be a colonistic approach to it, or to this research? We want them to be involved, but we also don't want to make them feel as subjects, but rather as partners. I found that to be really important. And also, the way we presented our work and the way that we not just saw everything in a public health lens, or in a medical/clinical gaze, or just in a social gaze. The people who were in those meetings were not always just the public health officials. They usually pointed to me for like the social aspects of things and whether or not it was socially ethical. Then we had some people who were partners that were in CBOs, community-based organizations, some government organizations, and then some private businesses or other community members. We even had a whole sector that was for the Office of Faith-Based Initiatives. So, a lot of faith leaders were also there because we knew they were very influential within the community, so we valued their opinions, too. And we

wanted to make sure that we saw every perspective that we could in order to be able to better serve them.

So now I think of it that way—when I'm doing pretty much any work or I'm reading something, I try to see it not only from one perspective, but I try to see things from okay, how would a politician see this? Or how would a psychologist see this? A sociologist? Trying to think of different ways that we can get to the goal we want to get to, but not always necessarily seeing it from one way.

It's like this example that I just saw the other day. I forgot who brought it up. But it was from a *New York Times* article. There was this picture of a whole bunch of screws and nails. But there was the guy with a hammer. If you only see things through one lens, you're only going to fix your problems that one way. They were trying to hammer everything down. It's going to be a lot harder to hammer down the screws than it is with the nails. But now that you have a different perspective, you have a screwdriver and you can screw in the screws.

So that's how I view things now. It's not just seeing it one way. How else can we see it? And also, being critical about our motives and our actions. I think that's what I brought back from there. And that fast pace, too. I love that energy. Coming back, I could feel and see how much it's slowed down over here.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, tell me about coming back to Santa Cruz from New York City. (laughs)

Garcia Zepeda: I was excited for one or two days. And then after that, I was like I want to go back to New York. I think it was just—for some reason, I felt like I had more

purpose over there. Maybe because of the work I was doing, but also just the environment helped. It was just conducive of that. Being back was difficult and still kind of is. Also, the work I was doing, I felt like I left it. I don't know if I got attached to it, but I did get invested in it. So, I told them, "If you need help with anything, I'll still be more than happy to help out with it." Especially in the PCF project. I really wanted to continue that work because it was something that was almost personal, being a Latino initiative. I felt like I really wanted to help out with this project.

Critical Engagement

So, coming back, it was—it was almost depressing. Because then everything slowed down. I had to finish classes. I still am finishing them. I just felt like, being in classes, too, I noticed that critical engagement had dissolved for some reason. I feel like a lot of the courses now are not really critically engaged. It's become sort of this textbook analysis of things. I don't know how to describe it. I feel like students just go and are on their laptops, like on Facebook or something, on their social media, answering emails, and not really engaging with the work being presented, or thinking about the work in a way that's going to affect their own lives.

Vanderscoff: In the classroom, you mean, specifically?

Garcia Zepeda: Yeah. I brought this up with one of my professors. I brought it up with Mary Beth. I was asking her why we only see things in one perspective. I understand that we're a very liberal school and that most of us, at least I hope, know what is politically correct because we've been exposed to it so much here. Even in my classrooms—and I'm talking about community studies classes, where a lot of the students are very liberal and very, I guess they're very socially active with social

activism. But we don't really hear the viewpoints of the right wing, perspectives that we generally don't agree with, being liberal. I was trying to figure that out. Because when I went to New York, I was exposed to a lot of the different viewpoints. At first, I would get mad. I didn't know how to respond to it. After a while, I learned how to and I was able to appreciate that. We should be exposed to this. When we do go to our field studies, or when we do go out there, to the real world, we're going to be exposed to such different viewpoints. If we just sit there and start yelling or raising our voices, it's not going to make any difference. But if we know why they think that way, maybe we won't be able to change their viewpoints, but at least we can have a better conversation and dialog about why it is they think that way and give them a different perspective about the other side. I think that's more important. That's something that I see is lacking in our education here. I wish there was a little bit more of that.

Vanderscoff: Is that by virtue of the fact that you're in a program like community studies, which has a liberal or even radical reputation? Or is that something that's in the education itself? Like in the professors or the pedagogy?

Garcia Zepeda: I think in the education itself because a lot of the other courses that I've taken that are not necessarily sociology or community studies, they joke about it, the professors, or they'll allude to it. You can feel or you can see that they have a liberal mindset. Which is fine. But I feel like that notion doesn't bring forth other perspectives; it doesn't bring forth the conversation [about] other viewpoints. I am not necessarily saying that I agree with those viewpoints. I'm just saying that I'd rather be exposed to them in this environment, where at least I know that most of us don't have those viewpoints, but we can still find a way to counter-argue those viewpoints, so then when we are exposed to them, we'll be able to have that dialog.

I do feel like I would have enjoyed a lot more of this critical engagement in that aspect within all my classes. I don't think I've ever had a class where it's been—not in the sense of students were shut down—but even within our UC Santa Cruz community there are students who don't have the same liberal viewpoints that a lot of us have. I respect that. I think they should also have the opportunity to speak out on their own perspectives, and as students and as this community, we should be able to listen to them as well, and not argue with them, but be able to see their perspective and be able to negotiate, I guess, or understand them a little bit more. I've dealt with students, especially in student government, where their viewpoints were a lot more conservative. When I was chair, most of the students in the student government were very liberal [but] there were a few that was a little conservative. And those individuals who were a little bit more conservative would be a little bit more outspoken, too. But at the same time, they would be shut down by the other students. I would try to facilitate that so they wouldn't be shut down, but they would have the opportunity to speak, because I think that they still have the right to speak. I think it's important for the students to listen to that perspective even if they don't agree with it. I think it perpetuates the idea that oh, liberals are just here to be screaming and yelling about what the Right is doing wrong. I think that at least if we're educated about what they think and their perspectives, we'll be able to counteract that argument. And then hopefully, I mean, I don't know if it will happen, but maybe change their viewpoints, or at least make them think in a different way. 'So, I thought that was important. And some of the things, they would make me cringe—some of the things that the conservatives would say. But at the same time, I was like okay, I have to give them the opportunity to speak so they can at least speak their mind. And then we can all kind of, as a group, dissect it and be a little bit more critical about it.

More on Student Government

Vanderscoff: So this actually gives us a great opportunity to segue into some of your involvement in the college. We've gone an hour and a half, and I want to be sure that we get to some of that. So, if you could perhaps say a little bit about your time in student government—what have those issues been? If you can think about what those conversations have been, as a way of thinking about what's defined your time here.

Garcia Zepeda: I was chair for two years. And the same issue would come up every year. The most contentious issue was the divestment from Israel. We had pro-Palestine groups come in, and pro-Israel groups come in, and then we would have a two-state solution group come in. But a lot of the students—that's when most of them would get divided on opinions. This might sound terrible to say, but I liked seeing that the students were a lot more engaged during that time and they were a lot more vocal about their opinions. Even the students that were a lot more quiet during the whole year—during that time I would see them flourish, almost. They would talk about their own opinions on the subject. It got heated at times, but I think that that was important. I don't think I ever did silence anyone unless we were going overtime or something, like it got really late. Then I would be like, okay, let's just keep it down to a few comments. I thought it was so important for them to speak out their mind and really understand where everyone else was coming from. That was a big part of what I believed student government should be: this engaged group that was also knowledgeable about the rhetoric around campus and also outside of campus. So that was one of the biggest issues.

Vanderscoff: Did you wind up having a vote on that?

Garcia Zepeda: The vote came up. The reason why we had that vote was the SUA had to decide whether or not to bring up this divestment, I forgot what they call it. It's like a letter that they bring, and then they send out to the Regents and then the Regents send it to the president.

I think we were just going to all vote, one vote for each. So, one yes; one no; one abstention, since we had three representatives for the SUA. But I do remember that when the votes came in, I had to do the vote through email. And I had emailed the person when they were going to vote—the vote was supposed to be in that form. But I guess they didn't read my email when I sent them the tallies to the representatives. And they all voted for the divestment, when in reality it had all been, like we had decided okay, one's going to be yes, one no, one abstention. During the MSG meeting of 11/12/15 where how we were going to vote on the divestment issue was discussed as group we decided to read over the information prior to a decision. The votes were sent to me via email and the vote tally was forwarded to the SUA representatives. Based on the votes the representatives should have voted 1 yea, 1 nay, and 1 abstention. Of course, the SUA representatives can vote as they like, but it is highly encouraged to be representative of the student body not personal bias. '

I actually don't remember the overall outcome of it, because it was a while ago. But I know that divestment is still an issue that comes up. So that was one of the most contentious issues we had.

Others were—some were, I think, just more education on the subject was needed, like mental health or gender identity. Especially during my last few months in student government, as chair, I remember at the beginning of the meetings I would bring up

articles or show videos of something that was happening in the political spectrum and have them respond to it. It was not necessarily like a right wing or a left-wing media source, but it varied. Sometimes it was; sometimes it wasn't, but I really wanted to see how they would react to it and how they would respond to it. It was interesting to see some of the responses. Some of the things I took for granted, that I thought oh, no, everyone knows that this is the right thing were challenged during those. And I was like, okay, well, at least I'm getting to see this now, and now I can understand a little bit more about the person and also their viewpoints.

I think one of them was transgender. It was the transgender restroom policy that was happening in North Carolina. So, I brought that up and there was some transphobia in the group. So, it was a time of reflection for me to be like, okay, maybe I should start doing a little bit more education on these broader subjects that I need to maybe go over a little bit more and take a little bit more time to help them flesh it out and explain. So, I thought that was important.

It was difficult at times when they had these opposing viewpoints because there were some students who were a little bit more vocal, and as chair, I have to stay neutral on the subject matter. Or you don't have to, but I chose to stay neutral, so I can be the mediator between any disputes that would come up. So, there was times when, though I agreed with some of the people that were being a little bit more vocal, I had to not silence the group that I did not necessarily agree with. I still knew that they had a right to their opinion. So, at times I had to look beyond my own viewpoints and be able to provide a space where it was a safe space for anyone, regardless of viewpoints. That, at times, was frustrating. But I thought it was important for everyone to be able to be heard.

The Student Housing Crisis

Vanderscoff: I know you also spent time working at Crown-Merrill housing as well. I've had a lot of students in these interviews talk about the housing crisis, be it on or off campus. I wonder what sort of insights that you might have on that, having worked on it as a student employee?

Garcia Zepeda: Sometimes students think, "Oh, the administration's not worried about it." Or that the housing office, they don't care, either. They really do. It does affect their work as well. I remember Lindsay, who was my supervisor there—she would be stressed out about knowing that there were going to be a lot more students coming in. I think next year also there's even more students coming in. And we have lack of space. So, it's something that affects everyone. It affects the health of the individual and their mental health. If you're in a space where you have overcrowding, one, it's going to affect your education, because you're going to be stressed out about that. And then it's going to affect your mental health, which then can affect your physical health. It just keeps leading to more and more problems. The solution would be, let's build more buildings and more residential spaces. But then there's so many old restrictions that were put in place where there are certain places where you can't build. You can't build above the trees now. Luckily, the trees have grown a lot more, so maybe they can still build up. And then the timeframe of building all these new buildings.

But yeah, there definitely is a large housing crisis. I did see it with students. Students would come in frustrated. I don't think there's someone you can point a finger at, other than us just not having enough money for it. And most of our funding comes from taxpayers, so unless you want to increase taxes, which I'm fine with— Some of the

things that maybe we're spending too much money on—I don't know the budget that well, so I can't speak on that. I do know that that would probably be one of the bigger aspects to why we don't have enough space is just money-wise. I don't think it's in anyone's interest to be devious and be like, yeah, let's put in more students even though we don't have the space for it. It's a problem that we have with the space that we're in.

I think we have to find a way to work with it. It is frustrating, and it is difficult. I felt that within the housing office. Everyone's trying to work with it and we all have to make some sort of sacrifice. I do think that it does affect students, staff, and faculty, and the administration, in every facet. I wish there was an easy answer to it, where it's like yeah, we just magically get a whole bunch of new buildings, or a whole bunch of dormitories. But unfortunately, it doesn't work that way.

Vanderscoff: You mentioned that you yourself started in a triple. So in a way, the whole proliferation of triples, and quads, for that matter, is one of the results of this housing shortage.

Garcia Zepeda: Yeah. I understand there are some students who need special accommodations, where they would need a single, or they would need maybe more space. I don't know the other special accommodations that would be needed. That, I totally agree with. If they need that, then yes, give it to them. I hope nobody's being denied anything in that way.

But also off campus, being an off-campus student now—it is really difficult to find housing. And the housing market is a lot more expensive here in Santa Cruz now, too. Even where to find it and being able to get a location is difficult for students. I've noticed it a lot. All of my friends keep asking me if there's going to be an open space at

my house once I leave. And unfortunately, there's not, so I have to tell them that. It's kind of hard, because I know they're struggling to find a place. I don't know what to do. There's so many students and so little space. And a lot of students don't want to be in doubles or triples again. They want to have their own space, which is fine. That's important. You should have your own space. But it's just really difficult and also really expensive.

And then the regulations, as far as where you can live and how you can live and the living situation. Some landlords might not allow for more than, let's say, four people in a house that could fit maybe like seven or eight people. Or other regulations where maybe they don't allow pets. Some students actually have those pets because they need it for stress coping, I guess? If they have the paperwork, [the landlords] should be fine with that. I haven't heard stories about that, though. But I do know it's difficult to find housing. I was fortunate enough to find housing because of an old friend. But I keep saying it—I just don't know what to do.

I'm working on a project with Cynthia Chase, the current mayor right now, and with University Relations, Howard Heevner. We're trying to develop this project where we're going to be discussing some of these key issues like housing, the water situation, and some of the other regulations, and how the city, the UCSC community, and just the people of the community itself within the city can all work together to bridge the gap between miscommunication between all these groups, how we can work together to provide a sustainable, equitable, and community-driven city. Housing was one of the big issues that we brought up. This city is growing at a fast pace, in part because of the students, but also because of the high growth in jobs that's been happening. So, it's something that's still in the works, I guess, with that project. But it's something that's

just so difficult, I think, to engage with. I don't know. I wish I had the answers to all these questions and I wish I could do something about it now, versus in the long run. But at the moment I don't have a key answer to that.

The Genomics Institute

Vanderscoff: Well, no one does. So, pivoting to some of your other areas and involvements here, one of the things that UCSC is best known for nationally and internationally is work on the human genome.

Garcia Zepeda: Yeah.

Vanderscoff: And one of your involvements here has been as a program assistant with the Genomics Institute. I'm wondering if you could say a little bit about that job.

Garcia Zepeda: Yeah. So, I was able to get into that position as a program assistant within the Office of Diversity under Zia Isola, which is within the Genomics Institute. I've learned so much from them all. Being within that environment, it's always been exciting, the Human Genome Project, conducted by Dr. David Haussler. When I first got hired there, I was really excited just to even meet him and learn a little bit more about the project itself. So being a program assistant there has given me the opportunity to talk to a lot more people involved with the project. And now moving forward with their bigger initiative, which is the big data to knowledge, their framework through the NIH and the NHGRI, moving forward with big data has been something that they're working with now for the past, I think it's been four, six years? They've gotten a lot more funding and even within my own office that I work for, the Office of Diversity, I think they've really come a long way from what genetics used to be, and genomics, and

really delving into this idea of: what does it mean for diversity and how does it affect people who are not necessarily from the white middle class, and what it means to have all these intersectional identities and also cultural backgrounds that also shape the person. I think that, especially in the Office for Diversity, Zia is very involved and very understanding of that aspect. She's striving to make sure that it just doesn't become another science project, but really delving into the fact that diversity exists, and how does genetics play a role in the future of genetic diversity?

There was a project that we did last year and we're going to do again this year, the BD2K, Big Data to Knowledge project. We had a few students come in from different universities, one from the University of Puerto Rico, and a few from the University of Louisiana, Baton Rouge? And then some from Monterey, CSU Monterey. And then some UCSC students. But the main focus is to pair some of these students with labs within the Genomics Institute. So, some were paired with the Haussler Lab. Some with the Josh Stuart Lab, and some with the Treehouse Childhood Cancer Initiative Lab. The Shapiro Lab, is the other one.

So, they get mentored with them and they get paired up. So even though I wasn't there for the actual program, since I was in New York doing the research, I was able to come back and see how it had all worked out. From what I've heard, there was great feedback. We're going to do it again this year. This time I actually will be here over the summer, so I'll be able to participate a little bit more and engage with the students who will be visiting again from the same universities. I don't think there's any new ones coming in.

Another project that I work with closely within the Genomics Institute is on DNA Day, which is coming up on April 25th. That is the celebration of the discovery of the double helix, and also, the completion of the Human Genome Project. We partner up with the NHGRI to celebrate this day. So, we create this—it's almost like a fair. We have student organizations come in. We have WISE, which is Women in Science and Engineering; we have a few other organizations where it's other students of minority background in the science and technology and engineering and mathematics majors. And we have some other organizations that come in that are from the Resource Centers.

The main focus is to explain and showcase the diversity that exists within our campus, and also in the STEM majors, and the diversity that is our whole community. And we celebrate the accomplishments that these students have made. They showcase their research, too, through the Research Mentor Internship program, the RMI. Students who have been awarded this award present their research that deals with something in the genetics field. But also, a lot of them focus on how that involves diversity.

It's a really fun celebration. Last year, and the year prior to that, we had a DNA dance where a lot of people were wearing these—you would get one of the amino acid t-shirts, and then you would kind of be different colors, depending which one you were, you would pair up with the other person and then you would kind of make a double helix. It was really cool. It was a lot of fun. I really enjoy event programming, or event planning, just the whole aspect of it, even though it's really stressful at times. I love that. I love being stressed out, for some odd reason. I really enjoy seeing the outcome of it and seeing people enjoying themselves.

Those are some of the bigger projects that I've worked with at the Genomics Institute. I've learned so much from them. Zia is also a great mentor. I feel like every time I meet somebody new, I almost always try and learn something from them. Definitely, a lot of my work ethic comes from her. I think her definition of diversity and mine align very well. And by that, I mean that diversity is not just your skin color, or your background, but everything that shapes the person that you are, how your multiple identities intersect. Sometimes I use myself as an example. You might see me in the way that I present myself, but you might not know one aspect of me, or another aspect. And you can navigate through these different identities. Sometimes they do hinder you, but other times you can also use them to your advantage, depending.

I think that's part of the whole aspect of being diverse: it's not always easy. There are roadblocks. For me, being Latino, first generation, undocumented, gay, coming from a very strict religious family, having ADHD, I mean, there's so many multiple—I can't even think of all my identities now. But they all intersect. And though sometimes it's difficult to deal with a certain aspect of my identity, I can fall back on a different aspect of my own identity, and that helps me move forward. I think that Zia and I share that in that we both believe in the multiplicity of identities within diversity and how that really shapes the people around us. Sometimes you might think oh, it's just all these white people here. But there's even diversity within them. I'm not saying that I don't see color. I do. Diversity is far more complex than just race, as a lot of people have framed it. And I'm like no, there's so much more to it. And I think that's important for our university as well.

We're also, I think, now a Hispanic-serving university, I think that they should also understand what does that mean and that even being Latino or Hispanic is not a monolithic idea or identity. [someone enters, says she has the room reserved]

So then seeing intersectionality within the genomics aspect really helped me in demonstrating how, even though I'm not a STEM major, how being in the social sciences is still an important aspect of genetics. I think it's sort of similar to what was happening in New York. It's seeing things within a social/ethical lens and being able to navigate that lens in different environments, in this case genetics.

Financial Struggles

Vanderscoff: So another thread that runs through this whole thing, actually going back to the beginning of our session, is the thread of economics. So, coming towards our conclusion here, but just a few questions before we get there. So, you mentioned that that was a consideration and not say, going to Cal Lu [California Lutheran] in the first place. And so, you've been at school in a time of tuition hikes, in a time of rising rent prices in Santa Cruz County. And so, I'm curious then, anything you might like to say about the economic dimension of being a student.

Garcia Zepeda: Yeah. It's not easy, that's for sure. It has been really difficult. There's been times where I don't have that much access to food, or access to basic necessities, which is ironic, because I actually worked for the dean of students on a project called the Care Closet. I think now Slug Support is the actual title for it. It's to help students in financial strife to get access to basic necessities. I mean, being a student who actually was affected by these things, I did take advantage of the program itself, too. But yes,

there's been times where it's like okay, do I want to eat, or do I want to pay rent? It's a serious decision that I've made. And sometimes I have to pay that rent, so it's that.

There was a very difficult time when my work permit had not been renewed yet, so I could not work. That's when I really got stressed out because I didn't have any access to funds from anywhere. So, I had to ask around everywhere that I could to try and find those funds. Luckily, Zia was able to help me out through the RMI Scholar fund. Then she also had me speak with EOP, and EOP was able to help me out, too. So again, I think it was, in part, being able to have had that initial conversation and introduction to some of the resources on campus that helped me feel more comfortable asking for those resources and kind of advocating for myself. That's been important. Because sometimes it's difficult to do that, and you don't always have someone there to hold your hand and take you to the office, or take you wherever it is that you need to go. I can see that a lot of students get frustrated when that happens, when they don't know who it is that they have to talk to, or they have to go from one office to the next. I also used to work at the financial aid office. I knew the inner procedures that were done within the office. I feel like that's why I never really have a bad image of administration, or a bad image of anyone, because I've worked in different sectors within the university to understand where they all work and their limitations to what they can do versus other students where it's kind of like, "Well, Financial Aid has all the money so they should be able to give me the money." It just doesn't necessarily work that way. So, I've had to navigate through different outlets of where I can find the funds that I need or the help that I needed, whether that was going to the food pantry, going to some food closet, going to free events. I love going to free events because there's always food. A lot of students,

I've noticed that's the main [reason] why they go to events is for the food and the entertainment.

And so, I mean, I've survived up to this point. I'm almost graduating. So, I think that it's doable. It shouldn't be this difficult, but unfortunately it is. If I had the means, or if my family had the means, then yeah, they would have helped me out, I'm sure. But that's not the case. I just hope that right now I'll deal with this and maybe not have the most luxurious life. But if I have a means to survive, then I think I'm good. Maybe later on I'll be able to be in a better financial situation. For now, I'm good.

Vanderscoff: Now that you're at the end of your degree time here, what sort of advice would you pass on when it comes to having to make those sorts of hard choices, like do I pay rent or do I feed myself? Like what the clear takeaways for you are from that?

Garcia Zepeda: I think one of the most important things is to ask for help and not to be shy about it. I think that's something that there's a lot of stigma [about], students not wanting to ask for help because they don't want to be seen as irresponsible. They don't want to be seen as not independent enough to be able to survive on their own. A lot of students—they might not ask their parents because they don't want them to know. I mean, there's different situations for everyone. But I think you should take advantage of the resources that you have on campus and really seek out those resources. It might not be easy. For me, it wasn't. Yes, I did know some of the people, so it helped guide me to where I needed to go. But it didn't mean that they were doing the work for me. I still had to go to the offices. I still had to talk to the people and explain my situation. Sometimes I had to explain my situation in one day to five different offices, five different people. It was frustrating, but at the same time at least I felt like something

was getting done. And you have to be on top of things. Sometimes you're the one that has to be a little more adamant about things and advocating for yourself. It might take a little bit more effort on your part, but at the end of the day it is to help you out, so it's in your best interest to do so.

Definitely, I would have to say if you have the opportunity to use some of the resources, being undocumented I can't use, like I can't take advantage of food stamps, so that's something that I wish I could, because that would definitely help me out. But those students that can, I have some friends who have that stigma from back home of, that's a bad thing to use welfare or food stamps. That's not something that's looked highly at, so they choose not to, even though they're struggling. But I think if you have the opportunity to do so, you are a student right now and you do need to be eating. If not, then it's going to affect everything else. I guess that's my views on health talking again. You have to be able to be healthy in order to learn, and if you're going to be distracted because your stomach's growling than you should like—I mean, there's other priorities right now other than your education. I know it's important to be in a space where you can live, but also thinking about can you really afford this single, when maybe you can get a friend to live with you and you pay less of the rent, and you'll have a lot more money to be able to buy food.

So, I think it's really one, seeking out the resources, and knowing what those resources are. It might take asking a few people. But I think that's important. And also, really analyzing and reflecting on what it is that you're doing and where you are, and if really the way you're living your life is the most economically feasible one that you can take on. And also, just I think having friends that are going to be able to sometimes even advocate for you. I've had friends who don't want to. They're very headstrong and

they're kind of stubborn and they don't—like I've had to literally send out emails on their behalf to these people and say, "This person needs help. They didn't tell me exactly what it is. I have an idea of what it is, but I need you," and I would tell like Lucy Rojas or I would tell Erica Papas, "Can you email them and follow up with them? And even if they don't email you back, set up an appointment with them because then they will show up." Sometimes I had to do that extra step for them just so they would actually get the help. And sometimes it did take me having to hold their hand and take them to the office. If you are the person that has access to these resources, then help others. I think that was important. I wasn't selfish about it; I really wanted to, if I knew about this resource, I would tell other people. "Here's a resource you can use." Or even if I didn't know the answer, maybe I can guide you to someone that can help you out.

Vanderscoff: And you're talking about the importance of peer supports and peer networks here, as well, and community health.

Garcia Zepeda: Correct, exactly.

The Santa Cruz Community

Vanderscoff: So another thing I wanted to loop back on is, you've had some insights on the city itself—your involvement with the former vice-mayor and mayor in academic and other settings and some of your thoughts on housing and security. But one of the ways we actually started was that you mentioned that when you first came here, you engaged with the Jehovah's Witness community here. So, I'm wondering if we can start from there and then talk about the significance of the town and different communities within it—what that has meant for you as a student here at different times?

Garcia Zepeda: Yeah, that's actually interesting when you frame it that way, because I didn't really think about it. But now, looking back, I can see how being part of that Jehovah's Witness community so early on within Santa Cruz, I really got to get a different perspective on Santa Cruz itself. Especially when I went out preaching with them on Saturday mornings, I really got to see the different communities within Santa Cruz. Since it was in Spanish, I mostly visited a lot of Latino neighborhoods within Santa Cruz. And interacting with them and the conversations I had, and learning about their struggles and their worries got me a little bit closer to that community of the Santa Cruz city. It was interesting, because then a lot of these communities that I had already interacted with were talked about in my classes, like the Beach Flats, or some of the indigenous populations of Oaxaca—there's a high density of them here. And even going farther into like Watsonville; sometimes I would go over there for other activities. Sometimes we had talks, or we had to go for other preaching services. So I got to experience that aspect of the community here. And being part of that at that time, it helped me see how different it is. It seems like a very predominantly white neighborhood. But how is that these people of indigenous background, and also these Latino communities are able to function and live in these white neighborhoods? And how do they function and navigate through it?

And also, their identity—I noticed that a lot of them sometimes were also not willing to speak Spanish at times. One of them actually told me that it was because they had grown up in an environment where their school would tell them not to speak Spanish, and they would always be scolded for speaking Spanish, and to only speak English. So, they said that now that they're adults, why is it that people are trying to speak Spanish to them, when their whole lives they were trying to make them speak English? It was

offensive to them. It was a whole different perspective for me to see that. I was trying to make it more of a trust thing, where I was speaking Spanish to them because I felt familiar with them. But then, when they chose not to speak Spanish back to me, and only in English, you could almost see that barrier in front of you.

That was really interesting because it not only showed how those past experiences almost closed them up, but also how then that's going to affect their children. Because their children did not know Spanish. Their children, they didn't know anything other than English. And they were complaining that their children were struggling in Spanish courses that they were taking in high school, or that they were taking in middle school. And I was like, "But don't you speak Spanish?" It was like, "Yeah, but I don't speak to them in Spanish." And then it was like this whole—like for me growing up, always speaking in Spanish—it was so different to see people actually hiding this from their children, or taking it away from them. That was almost shocking.

But then, once I left the Jehovah's Witness, it was difficult because some of them actually work on campus. They all live within the community and it's not that easy to leave the Jehovah's Witness church. Once you leave, it's not like you sign a paper and say okay, you're gone. There's consequences to leaving. You get excommunicated, or you can get censured. And that means that the whole community will not be able to talk to you, including your family, if they are also Jehovah's Witness. That didn't happen because I just left on my own accord without explaining why. But I did get a lot of phone calls and a lot of different ways of them trying to communicate with me and trying to figure out what was happening, why I stopped going. I just ignored a lot of those calls. They eventually called my family and they asked where I was. They were worried about me. That's a whole other story. That was really stressful for some time

being here. So that was a time where I didn't really go out into Santa Cruz. I kind of stayed only on campus, because I felt like if I would go down there I would see them, or I would have to interact with them, and it was something I just didn't want to do. So, it was a time of almost being just on campus.

But then after that, interacting with the vice mayor, now mayor, I learned a little bit more about the community itself as far as policy goes, and also some of the broader issues at hand here in the city, especially, like I said, housing, water, and some of the budgeting issues, security, the homeless population, which deals more with the housing issue as well. And one contentious issue that they brought up was the needle exchange or deposit, what do they call, syringe boxes. That was another issue that was brought up, too. So, learning about these issues, especially from someone who is in the public sector, in city hall, was really insightful and also helped me understand a little bit more about why certain things are the way they are.

That was very helpful because I started to learn a little bit more about certain limitations that exist within the public sector. I feel like that's something, again, that needs to be taught to other students as well. I think we're quick to point the fingers and blame others — this is the person in charge of this, so they're the ones. But it's not necessarily that. There's so many more, I guess, interlacings to it, and so many more complex policies and regulations that limit the number of things they can do. That's the same for the administration here, the same for the community, and the same for the city itself. I've seen that. Now that I've been exposed to all three, I can see how they all kind of work with these limitations. But also, again, I don't know who I can blame. I don't think there is someone to blame. I think it's just how can we work with the means that we have to provide for social change.

National Politics

Vanderscoff: So one thing we've been bringing up in all of these interviews—it's sort of a way of getting into the present tense, the present moment—is that you've also been here at UCSC at a time of substantial political change. There have been a series of events on a nationwide scale, which have had ripples here and in communities all across the country. So, I just wanted to start by saying if there's anything that's happened nationwide that really stands out to you, if you could comment on that. And I would like to specifically invite you to comment on the recent presidential election and the impact of that on you and the community here.

Garcia Zepeda: I think that was actually one of the biggest political implications that really affected the community and the student population, and, I guess, everyone in this nation. Even prior to the presidential election, immigration has been an issue that keeps coming up. And for a lot of students who are part of the AB 540 community, it's something that sometimes it seemed a little bit more hopeful, and now has kind of dismayed to what the reality of the thing is, which is it's scary. It's made it difficult for a lot of them to even feel a little bit more comfortable on campus. Before, a lot of us were a lot more open. We would speak out a lot more. I've noticed that a lot of us kind of quieted down and became a little bit more to ourselves, and not really feeling so safe to discuss who we are and what we believe in. Our voices kind of got silenced a bit. And others—they became a little more vocal and advocated a little more.

I wasn't here for the actual election results. I was still doing my field study. But I did hear that there was a very large rally protest here on campus once they found out the results. There was a public outcry for why is this—like what happened, really? I think a

lot of us were asking the same question: what happened? How is this possible? How is it that our current president is our current president? I guess, thinking back on it, what were some of the implications and factors that made it so that we have this president? For a lot of us, especially the undocumented folks here on campus, it's a time that we don't feel safe anymore. And we feel almost at a loss, because it's like: what's next and what's going to happen? There is a lot of fear and a lot of worry of, like what could be done, and are we really going to be protected by the university? And the trust that university had gained from us, it didn't go away. It's still there. But I think that we're a lot more guarded, I guess, a little bit more skeptical about who we talk to and why they're asking certain questions.

I mean, almost every student, I'm sure, was affected by this election, regardless of documented or undocumented. Folks who identify as LGBT, or even women, other minorities. Everyone was affected by this, even socioeconomic class. Just think of it, those who are not in the top 1 percent are going to be affected by this and are being affected by this right now. I feel like there are so many facets to it, that not just one thing would explain it. But the amount of people affected, and the amount of people that were in fear. I don't even know if we have a large Muslim population on campus. Maybe they're just not that visible. Or maybe they're less visible now because of what happened. There were just so many students affected by all this, that I can't think of one that wouldn't have felt fear or anger, or pretty much every emotion.

A rush of emotions happened that day. I was actually in Times Square looking at the results as they were coming in, hopeful that this wouldn't have happened. But when I did see—even the crowd, it went silent. It was quiet. And then there was a small group

of Trump supporters who started chanting, and started cheering. And they sounded so small in that huge group of people.

Even the next day, I remember going to work and it was so somber. People's heads were just like down. A lot of people, you could see puffiness, like they had been crying. Or some were in tears. Even the meetings that we had at work, they weren't really about work. They were just about talking to each other and being there for one another. And I think that that was something that was really important.

And even for the Santa Cruz community, I felt like a lot of us got a little more connected to each other. Because this was not a polarized issue. It wasn't just one person being affected. This was everyone being affected by different aspects of his administration, and the policy or the rhetoric, I guess, that he was talking about. There's a lot more mutual understanding, and sort of like this, I don't know how to describe it. It's like a, I don't know the word for it. I know it in Spanish.

Vanderscoff: What is it in Spanish?

Garcia Zepeda: Compa*ñ*urismo.

Vanderscoff: Like camaraderie or like comradeship or something?[38]

Garcia Zepeda: Yeah, yeah. That sounds very Marxist.

Vanderscoff: It does, in English, yes. (laughs)

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[38] The term can translate generally as these terms, and also as companionship.

Garcia Zepeda: I guess a lot of people like Marx in Santa Cruz, though. It's fine.

So, I feel that. I feel like a lot of the students are there for one another. Even when before you wouldn't have really seen these groups interacting; it seems like more people are interacting with each other.

Vanderscoff: So then in this political context, I wonder if you would mind sharing a little bit more about your own decision to be public about being undocumented, say in this interview, or however it is that you negotiate that in your life—what that means to you, that intentionality to be public about that.

Garcia Zepeda: I think that speaks again to how I was saying about navigating through your identities and really using them. I don't know if I'm using it to my advantage right now, to say it. But I think that it's important that if other people hear, or see that others are vocal about their own identities, then they feel safer to be who they really are, versus trying to hide who they are, or having that stress of not being able to really express themselves as they really are. So, for me being able to be kind of open about—there have been times where I don't say it, so I kind of feel out the space at times. But I feel that if I can say it and if I'm open about it, it almost puts me in a state that, okay, I'm offering myself up for anything that might come up, whether it's good or bad, from other people. And if I do that, then I feel that at least I'm doing myself justice to be open about it. But also, if I can help others in a way that if I'm vocal about it, then maybe they can be advocates in some different way. I think it's all about using the voice or, I guess, the privilege that you have, using that to whichever way or form that you can.

I'm terrible at social activism. I don't think I can go out there and protest because I don't know how to. I mean, I wish I could, or I wish I knew. But there's people who work

behind the lines, or work maybe in the legal aspect, or that work in maybe like news media or something. There's different outlets and different students do different things, as far as that goes. I'm just using the means that I have. So that's really what I do.

Vanderscoff: And so, a related question to that is: particularly in this political moment, what are some of the key practices or resources you have, as far as self-care?

Garcia Zepeda: I think especially right now, mental health was really important for a lot of students, especially myself. Having access to my therapist and to CAPS [Counseling & Psychological Services] was something very important to me, being able to go and talk to them, and having someone. My friend group, just my personal friends. And then, also some of the people here on campus. I think it's a difficult subject for everyone to bring up. Because you don't know if people really want to talk about it, or if they just want to be left alone on the subject. I've noticed that a lot of people will give the opportunity to talk about it if you'd like. But none of them are pressing you for answers, or pressing you for a response. I think that's something that's really important.

And also, just listening. Listening to one another has been something that has helped a lot. Sometimes people don't want you to answer back, to give them feedback, and that's fine. Others you gauge, depending how well you know them, or how the conversation went. You'll gauge and be able to know if they want the feedback or not. But just being a good listener could make a big difference. I think right now it's important that we really listen to each other and see what we can do for one each other at this moment. Because we don't want to leave anyone without any help, or without any ears, I guess I should say.

And for me, it's been that. Going to therapy, talking to my friends. And also, I got really comfortable with being by myself at times and just reflecting and being at peace with who I am and what I'll be doing.

Vanderscoff: And so, speaking about what you'll be doing, is there anything you'd like to share about your thoughts going forward, either at the remainder of your time here at UCSC, or then what you see beyond that.

Garcia Zepeda: Yeah. As cheesy as it sounds, something that's really resonated with me all these four years has been the ethos of Merrill: Cultural identities and global consciousness, or exploring cultural identities and global consciousness. That means so many things. It's been so close to my enrichment here. It's been being able to understand one another and seeing things. I think you've heard me say many times here about perspective and the intersectionality of different identities. I think that echoes the ethos that we may not be that different from each other. We all intersect at a certain point in our lives, though we might seem far from each other. It's funny, because I always look at animals and other species and I'm wondering how is it that they're aware of each other and they interact with each other, but as humans we choose consciously to ignore each other and to not really interact with one another, unless we have to, or unless we choose to. So, I always wonder—but we have so much in common, and yet we don't interact. And why is that? That's a question, more of a rhetorical, philosophical question about life. (laughs) The Merrill ethos is something I'm not going to forget and I'll continue to think about and reflect on in my everyday life.

Final Reflections

And moving forward, I do want to go into public health. I'm looking forward to that. I would love to continue to work for the Department of Health and I'm planning to move to New York after I graduate, to take a gap year, and then get my MPH, and hopefully get back into the Department of Health.[39] And if not, just go into the public health sector in some way or another. But that's something that I really want to do and focus on. There's just something so rewarding about it. I never felt like it was work. It always felt like it was my duty, almost, to continue to do that. I didn't see it like I pitied anyone, or like I was doing this to really—the whole make a difference in life thing. It was because I was actually invested in this and I actually wanted to empower people and to give them the resources and do anything that I could to actually help, not just individuals, communities, but anyone that I could, no matter who they were. I think that's something that I've cultivated here a lot, too, and that I'll take with me, is that altruistic mindset.

Vanderscoff: So that runs through the questions on my end. Is there anything else you'd like to say in closing about your lessons on personal and community health at UCSC?

Garcia Zepeda: I definitely want to give my thanks to all the people. I might have not mentioned everyone's names, but I know all those who have helped me throughout these four years and even prior, and they will probably help me out in the future. All

[39] Garcia Zepeda recently accepted a New York City Service City Corps position at the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene starting August 28, 2017.

these people are important to my life and that they really made a difference. I hope that I talked about all of them, and I hope that somehow they all know which parts they were mentioned in, and that I really appreciate all their efforts and their willingness to help. I think that for future generations, it's important to continue to do that, to take on students and to mentor them and to help them out, whether it's helping them out financially, helping them out in advice, helping them out in just guiding them to the right person. Or even, like I said, holding their hand and taking them into the office. All those small efforts really make a difference. I don't know, maybe some of these people didn't even know they made a difference in my life. And they made a huge impact, to the point where it's going to shape my future. I think that's really important. I think that's something we need to remember.

Here at UCSC, we have a very cohesive community and we like to help each other out. I think that's really helpful and also really inspiring for other students who are thinking about going to UCSC. I think that it's a great school in the sense of community. Maybe that should be our motto now. But I think that's one of the things I definitely wanted to mention was to always help each other out.

Vanderscoff: That's great. Well on my end, I'd like to thank you so much for your time, and for coming here and sharing your stories about yourself and all the work and study you've been doing here. And also, thank you for all the work you're doing.

Garcia Zepeda: Thank you. I appreciate it. Thank you for offering me this. It was a great experience.

Vanderscoff: Okay. With that, we'll close off this record.

About the Interviewer

Cameron Vanderscoff is an oral historian and writer with a versatile project portfolio. He consults widely in oral history in the US and in countries across three continents, including ongoing work on conflict resolution and capacity building with the Okinawa Memory Initiative in Okinawa, Japan, where he collaborates with UCSC faculty, staff, and students. His path in oral history started in 2011 with the Regional History Project, where he has conducted nine oral history interviews with twenty-five narrators, including *Student Interviews: 50 Years Later*. His creative skillset has also been developed through projects with media icon Tina Brown, Columbia University, the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, Phoenix House, the Apollo Theater, and many other organizations. He works as an interviewer with the Narrative Trust, a leading oral history firm based in New York, where he has lived since 2013.

An active voice in the larger field of oral history, Cameron also serves as the director of the Summer Institute of the Columbia Center for Oral History, and recently completed his tenure as co-chair of the 2017 Oral History & The City conference in New York.

In addition to his field experience, Cameron holds an MA in oral history from Columbia University and two BAs, one in history and one in literature (creative writing), from UCSC.